

ABSTRACT

This study describes the revival of Hawaiian carving and bowl-making that has occurred during the past fifteen years. Hawaiian art has long been regarded to be "dead." Extant examples in museum collections of the refined forms of wood bowls and full-round images, developed during a period of isolation for several hundred years prior to Western contact in 1778, are superior to any produced in the world during this period. Following the abolition of the state religion in 1819 by Liholiho, images could no longer be produced in this context. Traditional bowl-making also declined in the late nineteenth century.

There was little interest in wood-carving or bowl-turning in the twentieth century until the 1930s when a woodcraft industry developed, diminishing in the early 1960s. Concurrently, a successful industrial program and craft shop were instituted in the Hawaii State prison. (The study establishes that there exists an influential prison-carving tradition in Hawai'i.)

In the late sixties an interest in traditional Hawaiian art began to be manifest, attributed to the Hawaiian Renaissance and to a permissive attitude of the present generation toward Christianity that allowed the people to create ki'i once again.

Methodology includes interviews with nineteen Hawaiian and thirteen non-Hawaiian artists; and with Honolulu art establishment members, management of souvenir companies, former personnel at Oahu Prison, and others. Interviews were taped and the artists are quoted at length regarding tools, techniques, materials, a "link with the past," motifs and their meaning, commercial considerations, and personal goals. 116 photographs of the artists and their works are included.

Categories formulated to classify contemporary Hawaiian art are: Replicas and Reproductions of Traditional Art, Revised Reproductions of Traditional Art, Collectors' Art, Hawaiian Community Art, Adapted Art, Fine Art, and Souvenir Art. Work ranges from thin-walled bowls in traditional forms and reproductions of images to custom-made 'aumākua (guardian ancestors) for yards and abstract sculpture.

The study establishes that Hawaiian art exists today. Although the original religious complex that provided the impetus for traditional Hawaiian carving has been drastically altered, the spiritual significance of the objects to the artist and his Polynesian audience has not diminished.