

Artists of Hawai'i 2011 exhibition—go already

Modes of Interrogation

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This may sound harsh, but if you haven't attended this year's *Artists of Hawai'i* exhibition at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, you're basically indirectly suggesting that Hawai'i doesn't need a visual arts community. You're passively buying into a theory that suggests we, as community citizens, don't have an obligation to prove to the rest of the world that art in Hawai'i exists far beyond hyper colored palm trees and geckos wearing hats.

Local art, beyond its illusionary expectation, celebrates those artists whose visions are fixated on the uncanny boundary. In this case the boundaries are between Hawai'i's exterior and Hawai'i's interior; in between the place where pallid canvas retains its color and sculpture loses and then regains its form.

Through Glass, Darkly

The first pieces viewers encounter in the exhibition are portraits by Rachelle Dang. "Demonstrators Rally in Yemen" is a duo of watercolor and graphite on paper depicting ghostly images, blurred subjects and perpetual virtual beings.

Steven Garon's photograph "Blind Boy" is embossed in Braille, engaging the audience's aesthetic and political sensibilities. Moving through the exhibition, Osvaldo Brighenti's pencil on paper captures a trio of critics who speak densely about technical influence, prais-



Padilla's "Union" (above) and Cole's "Lady with a Mongoose" (right)

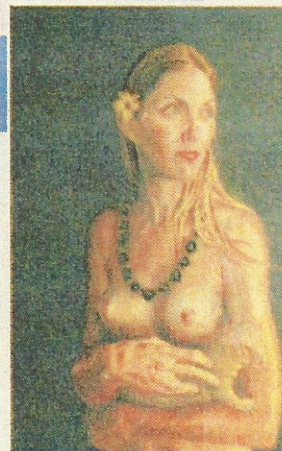
ing the artist's work. Sanit Khewhok's oil on canvas, titled "Church and State" is a cheeky nod to history's controversial use of courtesans and common folk. Perhaps it's the penguin barking at a man's head, or a choir being led by a woman-child, or the image of Dick Cheney next to a canvas with images of Mary Magdalene and an annoyed priest. Khewhok's paintings function as a reminder of political and religious waste, and by turning this accumulated visual junk into a traveling archive, contemporary ideas that may have once been discarded are meaningfully and ironically preserved.

Returning to a moment of minimal imagery, Stephen Niles's watercolor titled "Burnt Match and Shadow" says a lot—the empty canvas says a lot more.

"Lady with a Mongoose" (pictured at right) is an image coping with grief,

youth, gender and memory. Artist Peter Shepard Cole brilliantly paints the illusion of a mongoose and the reality of quick wit, sharp awareness and perceiving deception.

In a gritty acrylic painting, Jason Teraoka's "To Hell and Back" is a portrait of a man defined by throbbing grit and endurance. A personal favorite, the painting is technically impressive; a painstaking reproduction of what it looks like to be living, still.



Art as a Means of Merging

The heart of the exhibition may be Aaron Padilla's wood sculpture (known to many of us as "wooden knots") and appropriately titled "Union." Here we see a contemporary artist offering a dramatic cascade of mourning shapes and angles in celebratory fusion. It's been said before that Padilla's work is an exercise in discipline, an investigation of kinesiology and form, and this monumental piece reminds the viewer to look at art's past in present time.

At the center of Charles Bowen's "Homeless Homework" photograph, a small girl wearing a pink tie-dye shirt faces a chain link fence. Diamond Head in the distance, Bowen reminds us of the things accessible to only a few. The tiny rainbow strip of a Waikiki hotel hovers like smog; a Pepsi can on the street corner; a colorful fish blanket hanging to dry; and an empty shopping cart are all examples of our inability to connect the real dots.

This deeply personal and monumental exhibition of unsettling images, forgotten spaces and empty corners shouldn't escape you. And if you can't see what I'm seeing, look harder.

Honolulu Academy of Arts, 900 South Beretania St., Runs through 9/25, honoluluacademy.org, 532-8700