

---

## REVIEWS

---

Joan Abramson, ed. *Photographers of Old Hawaii*, 3rd ed. Honolulu: Island Heritage, 1981. Pp. 228, photographs, \$12.50.

Rick Golt, *Hawai'i Hawai'i*. Clemente Lagundiamao Jr., designer. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1981. Pp. 128, glossary, photographs, \$19.95.

A fascinating and dramatic contrast is presented by two recent Hawaiian publications, *Photographers of Old Hawaii* by Joan Abramson and *Hawai'i Hawai'i* by Rick Golt. The first is a historical documentation of Hawaii past, the latter a poetic photographic essay of Hawaii present. While both books were published in the same year as completely separate projects, they serve as companion volumes in the archives of photographic history of the Hawaiian Islands. Both books are exquisite and will serve as valuable resource material for historians, photographers, and artists in the years to come.

Abramson, a former *Time-Life* reporter, has done her homework well and provides fascinating glimpses into island history through her carefully selected photographs taken from the Bishop Museum and the Hawaii State Archives as well as private collections and other sources. Abramson covers the earliest history of photography from the time it first made its way to the Islands in 1845. Her illustrations of black and white photographs provide a window into Hawaii's past from 1850 to 1920 and are truly a representative sampling of photographic work in the Islands during the last half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. Abramson had a rich photographic legacy to choose from since the Hawaiian Islands had remained largely cloistered from the rest of the world throughout this time period, thereby preserving vast collections of photos intact; in fact, Abramson acknowledges the necessary limitations of choice from the vast heritage which has survived by mentally labeling this book "Volume I." However, the climate of the subtropics was not always favorable to the preservation of photographs, and temperature and humidity ruined many a fragile print.

Professional photographers are represented in the first half of the book because they were more numerous during the infancy of the craft due to the expense and rarity of photographic equipment; amateurs gradually began to appear as the art of photography matured, and they are repre-

sented in the later chapters. The early techniques of photography--ambrotypes, melainotypes, daguerreotypes, miniatures, leather, locket and ring pictures--are all here, and Abramson guides the reader on a sensitive journey into the past without becoming overtly sentimental. Photographic styles of the Victorian era are presented as they flourished; the cover photo of Miss Nellie Sisson Thrum at the shore of Hilo Bay around 1890 (again duplicated on pages 90-91), almost in the style of the French Impressionists in its charming romanticism, is more than balanced by the realistic photograph on the preceding page of the interior of a Hawaiian hut in the Puna district taken at about the same time by the same photographer, Charles Furneaux. Most of the illustrations are exceptionally clear for old photographs and well reproduced in a sepia-toned tint that contributes to the antique flavor of the book, while the fading and age spots of some of the prints actually enhance the overall effect. One flaw in this lovely publication is the omission of documentation for the actual dimensions of the photographs reproduced in the book. Inclusion of this information would be a positive aid to researchers and scholars in the field.

Early Hawaiian photographers included in the book are Hugo Stange-wald, Joseph W. King, Henry L. Chase, Menzies Dickson, Andreas A. Montano, Joaquin A. Gonsalves, Charles Furneaux, Edward N. Hitchcock, Frank Davey, L. C. Child, Caroline H. Gurrey (the one female representative), Thomas A. Jaggar, On Char, Theodore Kelsey, Tai Sing Loo and Ray Jerome Baker.

Abramson's concise yet colorful histories of each of these seventeen photographers provide insights into the mores and customs and the flavor of the times in which they lived. We learn, for example, that a Portuguese photographer of the 1880s, Joaquin A. Gonsalves, while photographing King Kalakaua to his evident satisfaction was simultaneously an active member of the anti-monarchal political organization known as the Honolulu Rifles! We are also informed that J. W. King, who ran a highly reputable Photographic Gallery on King Street in downtown Honolulu in 1861, was run out of town on a charge of being a "common nuisance," of having issued "indecent and obscene pictures," of a "disgusting assortment" of certain female persons!, delineating the truth that while times may change, human nature remains the same.

The book is also distinguished by the peek into the past allowed the reader which contributes to a deeper and more penetrating insight into history coupled with a feeling of personal participation. We are able to experience the passing of the original Chinatown, for instance, through the remarkable series of news photos taken by Frank Davey in 1900 when

large areas of Honolulu were quarantined and systematically burned to the ground during a Bubonic Plague epidemic. Through these old photos, it is possible to view the Nuuanu Valley vista toward the Pali from downtown Honolulu as it appeared in 1853, to study the work clothes of Japanese field-worker women cutting seed cane in 1890, and to catch for an instant the emotional intensity of a Chinese funeral on a rainy day in 1915.

The most memorable and haunting aspect of this book, however, is the faces of many nationalities, characters, ages and stations long gone from times long past, faces which transcend time to reflect our own humanity.

\* \* \* \* \*

In a personal photographic Odyssey through the Hawaiian Islands, Rick Golt has attempted to synthesize a harmony of contrasts through a unity of diversities in an effort to crystallize through selected images the essence of Hawaii through the medium of black and white photography, and he is largely successful. Golt has captured with his lens a timeless dimension of these tourist-trekking, over-exploited lands and has been able to slice through the multitudinous layerings of the many worlds and realities to reveal the underlying "magical quality" of Hawaii. The focus of this book is positive, a specific attempt to define and hold up for attention the spirit of these islands. It is a brilliant effort to spotlight the beautiful in the commonplace of island life and to identify the "tiny crystals of time" which reveal the inherent soul of Hawaii and its people.

Golt has collected a cross-section of Hawaiian scenes which are at once off the beaten path of the Polynesian metropolis and which yet portray contemporary life with the timelessness that is at the heart of Hawaii, ever flowing just below the surface of modern island life. Through the eye of his camera, Golt has recorded the grassroots with a strong and steady touch and has imbued the everyday with dignity and a sense of poetry.

In a beautifully expressed introduction, Golt defines his quest:

In Hawaii we share a spirit of acceptance and understanding nurtured by our many different worlds. These worlds exist simultaneously in time, in space; each is independent, yet intertwined with the others. We move from one to another in our daily lives, scarcely aware of the subtle yet remarkable change from world to world.

and his purpose:

Change moves swiftly through the world today, however, and its fingers touch even our islands. The harmony and balance we have known are not our permanently guaranteed rights. This underlying spirit of our many worlds is a delicate and fragile thing. . . . Now is the time to look around and see what a wonderful and beautiful world we share. . . . If we can simply appreciate that we do share something wonderful and good, we can preserve the spirit known to the world as Hawaii.

*Hawai'i Hawai'i* is truly a representative sampling, both profound and humorous. In a rich diversity of photographs, Golt focuses on Island faces in classic repose and unselfconscious activity: the Manapua Man, coin divers, and a little Waimanalo girl with burr-studded tresses solemnly sipping shave ice through a straw. His subjects range from the vast and awe-inspiring vistas of Haleakala and Mauna Kea to a pile of worn rubber Zoris beside a paint-peeled wooden door in Kaka'aka; from tumescent surf scenes to surrealistic lava flows; from a root-snarled country cemetery in North Kohala to a dream-like 'barber shop in Hanapepe, Kauai. It's all here: Ala Moana Park picnics, Kaneohe fruit stands (complete with prolific bunches of hanging bananas), and the legendary wind tunnel at the Pali lookout.

*Hawai'i Hawai'i* exudes a timelessness rare in a photographic essay. In some of the photographs (No. 10, The old church above Naopo'opo'o on the South Kona Coast of Hawai'i) the observer can almost experience the silence; in others, (No. 80, A rain-drenched tin-roofed banana shack in Laie) the scene appears exactly as it might have fifty years ago or more.

A vivid sense of contrast is demonstrated both in the photographs themselves and in the editing and choice of pictures. Clemente Lagundiamao, Jr., who designed the edition, is to be commended for his skill in capturing the spirit of the work and for the simplicity and elegance of his layout.

Golt and Lagundiamao make a fine professional team. Golt has the eye of a poet/artist as well as a journalist/photographer and imbues even familiar local landscapes with a heightened sense of reality combined with a dreamlike essence. His sense of timing combined with a talent for texture and composition focuses on images that are sharp, clear and very real. Lagundiamao's sensitivity for presentation contributes to this rare combination.

Two minor criticisms must be cited of this lovely work. The contrast in ink percentage in the title *Hawai'i Hawai'i* used on both the dust jacket and on the title page is obviously designed to underscore the theme of the simultaneously superimposed and overlapping worlds described in the book. This difference is not as dramatic as it should be, however, and appears to the eye of the viewer as faded print. Perhaps another color or a different percentage could have been used to delineate a more deliberate contrast. Entire pages of gray in varying shades are inserted throughout the text and do much to add a subtle thread of continuity and to justify the off-shade printing of the title, but the overall effect is perhaps a bit too subtle for the casual reader.

The photographs throughout are numbered *sans* captions, while the captions themselves are presented in a separate glossary at the end of the book. Although the photographic presentation without intrusion of the printed word is aesthetically pleasing, it is annoying to have to keep referring to the end of the volume in order to identify the locale or activity of the picture. Both points are minor, however, and might be considered stylistic options which do not detract unduly from the entire work.

Rick Golt, trained in literature and the classical arts, studied with Ansel Adams and Minor White. A resident of Hawai'i since 1967, his previous books include *Tropical Exotics*, *Hawaiian Reflections*, *Tropical Shrubs*, *Sculpture in the Sun* and *Eternal Saudi Arabia*. His photographs have appeared in many publications from local magazines to *Time-Life* book series.

Clemente Lagundiamao, Jr. is now associate professor and chairman of the design program with the University of Hawaii's art department.

Judi Thompson  
Institute for Polynesian Studies  
Brigham Young University--Hawaii Campus