

Roger G. Rose, *Hawai'i: The Royal Isles*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: Bishop Museum Press, 1980. Paper. Pp. xii, 223, illustrations. \$18.00.

Considering the amount of research materials available in ethnographic museums, it is good that some of it is squeezed out in a form accessible to a broad public as in this catalogue for an exhibition, *Hawai'i: The Royal Isles*, that is to travel between September 1980 to March 1983 to nine major museums across the United States. The exhibit was developed and organized by the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu; the catalogue prepared by project directors Roger Rose and Adrienne Kaeppler.

The exhibit is one of a distinct type supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities--and in this instance assisted by United Airlines--that pays respect to an ethnic culture within the United States by presenting a panorama of its past in the form of old drawings, photographs, recorded statements and a range of interesting objects, a kind of retrospective cultural history. All the different materials that make up this exhibit come from privately held collections in Hawai'i: such as the royal estates, but the majority are from the Bishop Museum. This is the first time most of the objects will leave the islands to allow us mainlanders to enjoy the treasures of Hawaiian history.

Such an exhibit is a genuinely complex undertaking and this catalogue provides a comprehensive documentation of the Bishop Museum's efforts: most of the exhibited objects are illustrated: 138 are in black and white, and sixty-six color plates enliven this large format catalogue. Most commendably there are sixty pages of excellent explanatory notes by Roger Rose on the illustrations. In a nine-page essay, Adrienne Kaeppler, the noted authority on Polynesian ethnography, contributes descriptive summaries of traditional Hawaiian customs and beliefs: on gods and spirits, taboo, political units, knowledge of the sea, marriage, child rearing, medicine, amusements, wars, music, clothing and food habits. Her special message is to emphasize the persistence of traditional values, in spite of the many changes.

In eye-catching style, the book begins with page after page of dazzling color plates. These are attractively designed as photographs, although the color processing of reds and yellows tends to be over-vivid. The series starts with a version by George Carter of the violent encounter that led to Captain Cook's death at the hands of the Hawaiians, the event that first brought Hawai'i to Europe's attention in the late eighteenth century. Next we see examples of the art works for which Hawaiian craftsmen have become famous: vigorous representations of human fig-

ures, food bowls, musical instruments and the glorious featherwork. However, what follows departs from the ordinary, in order to fulfill the aim of the exhibition which is to focus on Hawaiian values over time. For we see what interested (at least some) Hawaiians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: painting or photographs of Hawaiian royalty and all the paraphernalia of their class. Of special interest is a portrait of the famed King Kamehameha I who founded the first Hawaiian dynasty after contact with Captain Cook's expedition. Another gem of contact history is Plate 12, showing the baptism of the prime minister in 1819 by a visiting mission from the court of France. What is most apparent is the increasingly Victorian character of the scenes and objects: scepters, swords, silver cups and medals, coats of arms, elaborate court costumes and portraits. It is intriguing to see the nineteenth century trappings of royalty given the same photographic attention or glorification as the traditional symbols.

The assembly of black and white prints that make up the bulk of the catalogue may strike one first as haphazard, but these do cluster about selected topics: images of deities, the arrival of the first missionaries, calabashes and kings, the hula, and symbols of sovereignty. They are arranged so that a few pictures of objects alternate with a number of scenes, recorded by various means, from the Hawaiian past as landscapes, activities of groups of people or portraits of individuals, so that the sequence sustains and stimulates one's unflagging visual attention. The powerful messages on cultural contact from some of the scenes are unforgettable: the Hawaiian king and queen at the Royal Theatre in London in 1824, the assembly of chiefs in European clothes in 1837, the Christianized princesses and missionaries in a view of Honolulu in 1837, the Lincoln-esque portrait (1857) of Charles Reed Bishop who married the royal heiress Bernice Pauahi and who later founded the Bishop Museum to preserve the vanishing relics of Hawai'i in her memory, the Victorian mansion of Princess Ke'elikolani (1883) and the grass house in which she died, the *lu'au*, a nineteenth century invention, or feast at the shore in 1885, and the memorable image of Queen Lili'uokalani posed in full Victorian dress in 1892.

The outstanding and lasting treasure of this catalogue consists of the informative notes by Roger Rose, who deserves a special award for this research effort. In a lively style, he presents an excellent selection of interesting facets on each picture or object, often drawing on eye-witness accounts from the archives or on contemporary Hawaiian opinions. One of the most stimulating comments by a Hawaiian (1977) offers an interpretation of the strange form of the hook-pendant, the most valuable ornament of the Hawaiian repertory.

Rose may supply the history of an object, how it was made or used, comment on the varied and conflicting personalities in the royal dynasties, or trace the path through kings and queens to the end of the monarchy in 1893. Some of his remarkably comprehensive knowledge fills every paragraph with interesting concrete details and informed assessments so that even in capsule views, we grasp the course of events.

After perusing this catalogue, I would assume that even though monarchy per se may not be a significant value for Hawaiians today, the perspicacity and tenacity of the royal elite as reflected in their adoption and valuation of the trappings of English monarchy serves as an assertion of identity for Hawaiian people. What actually persists seems to be the more commonly held objects or customs, such as family lifestyle or the hula dance, although this dance costume has changed drastically with the introduction of grass skirts from the Gilbert Islands and the consequent showing of bare thighs.

Considering the evidence in the exhibition, Kaeppler's emphasis on the persistence of tradition seems more an article of faith than a reality. Some flat statements need qualification, such as the following (p. 57): "Changes in similar kinds of objects over time are visual representations of changes in social relationships. Changes in status, rank, prestige, and power are reflected in objects and the ways in which they were made and used." This may seem a well-accepted generality but elsewhere in the catalogue, Rose says (p. 185): "While utensils and costumes may have changed . . . the enduring social relationships of the *'ohana*, or family, symbolized by the poi bowl, are still fundamental to the Hawaiian life style of today."

Carved wooden bowls for poi (a food staple) seem to have been used and valued by the elite or upper class of Hawaiians (pp. 178-179) and their manufacture nearly vanished in the early part of this century (p. 178). This example suggests that it is misleading to declare a simple correlation between objects and social relationships, for, according to catalogue information, the family style continued although the elite poi bowl disappeared, only to be revived as a symbol today of contemporary ethnicity. It is also risky to assume, as Kaeppler goes on to declare (p. 57), that from an examination of objects the underlying concepts that persisted and changed can be followed. In some instances objects may not be the medium for carrying messages about enduring social relationships, which may be expressed in other forms; in other cases, objects may come to stand for quite another concept. Aside from this minor pitfall, likely to occur in a general essay, this catalogue, for its many illustrations and its concrete and informative texts that reveal the long chapter of contact

with Europeans in a vivid way, is highly recommended for all levels of interest in the Pacific.

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