

## ART EDUCATION Scholastic Reflection

Val Frieling Krohn

Almost 1,800 entries submitted for judging to an art exhibition? Twelve judges? Many awards? It appears to be one of those major international shows occurring only biannually somewhere on the US mainland or in Europe? No!—it happens every January right here in the State of Hawai'i, under the title "Hawai'i Regional Scholastic Art and Photography Awards Exhibition." This year marked the 20th anniversary that the intermediate and high school students in Hawai'i have submitted their art for judging in this prestigious event. Over the years, the number of entries has grown from 99 in 1962, with three schools participating, to nearly 1,800 entries and 53 schools participating in 1982. Persistently, this exhibition has been one of the most permanent, exciting, and refreshing exhibitions. It documents a very healthy and lively picture of one sector of the arts in Hawai'i, that of fine and applied arts taught in our public and private secondary schools. In order to understand the significance of this exhibition, one ought to first take a look at its scale and organization as a nationwide art activity.

The National Scholastic Arts Award exhibition is conducted annually by Scholastic Incorporated, publishers of classroom magazines, and producers of instructional materials. With the cooperation of public-spirited sponsors, such as Armstrong World Industries, Eastman Kodak Company, Hallmark Cards Incorporated, and Strathmore Paper Company, the Scholastics Art Awards exhibition has become an institution for students studying art in secondary schools throughout the United States. The event is placed on the Advisory List of National Contests and Activities by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Students in grades seven through 12, who are regularly enrolled in public or nonpublic schools, are eligible to participate in the exhibition. The entries are grouped into two categories based on the students' school grade: Group I encompasses grades seven, eight, and nine; Group II includes students in grades, ten, 11, and 12. It is understood that all art submitted to Scholastic Art Awards must be original, since the emphasis in this program is placed on creativity. The entries may be submitted into any of 14 classifications: oil, acrylic, watercolor, pencil, ink, pastel-crayon-charcoal, mixed media, printmaking,

graphic design, textile design, sculpture, pottery, jewelry, and two- and three-dimensional design not included in preceding classifications. The photography division is separated into the categories of black-and-white and color for the intermediate division (grades seven through nine), and black-and-white, color, experimental black-and-white, and experimental color for the high school division (grades ten through 12).

Seniors who are serious about studying art after graduating from high school may apply for scholarships, which are awarded on the basis of portfolios at the regional and, later, national judging. A student's portfolio has to include eight examples of his best work, including a minimum of three drawings. A scholarship applicant should be in at least the academic upper half of his graduating class. Nationally, 65 schools offer scholarships through this year's Scholastic Art Awards exhibition. Most typically, these art scholarships present tuition at a particular university or art school for one year.<sup>1</sup> A number of art students who once were recipients of such awards are now art teachers in Hawai'i's schools.



This year, a total of 55 regional scholastics art exhibitions will have been sponsored throughout the United States. In the regional shows the awards are gold achievement keys and certificates of merit. From these key-winning entries, finalists are selected according to national quotas based on the population of the region. Hawai'i's quota, for example, is only 125. The art of the finalists is forwarded to the national headquarters at Scholastics Incorporated, in New York, to be judged for the national exhibition and awards. When asked how our Islands' students' work is looked upon at the national level, Stanley Yamamoto, educational specialist for art education in the state's Department of Education, informed me that a member of the national committee said that Hawai'i's students' art is ranked among the top ten regions in the United States.

Having looked at the makeup and procedures involved in this gigantic exhibition at the national level, where approximately a total of 150,000 art works is submitted for judging each year, it is time to see what one specific region, that of Hawai'i, has to offer for this event. What are the contributions or characteristics of the arts and crafts of high school students in Hawai'i? How do their works differ from those on the US mainland? What makes the art of Hawai'i's school-aged students unique? Or, is it really unique and different from the art created by students in the Midwest or the South? As art educators we know that we are constantly surrounded by a rich and rewarding environment that is filled with creative potential—a source that can be tapped anew, filled with an unlimited supply of ideas, if we only let it touch and reach us with a



PHOTO BY CALVIN ABE

1982 Hallmark Winner, In-Hee You, Farrington High School.



PHOTO BY VAL KROHN

Quilted Textile Painting, Edward Bush, University Lab School.





PHOTO BY LAWRENCE HATA

Print, Lynda Rufo, Aliamanu Intermediate School.

sincerity so vital to our own and our students' creativity. The arts are so much integrated into our lives that we are often only peripherally aware of their presence, yet we feel and appreciate their beauty constantly. The Governor of the State of Hawai'i, George Ariyoshi, once stated:

Art in our Islands reflects traditions and themes relevant to our geography and to the many cultures which are found in happy harmony here. . . . Our art is dynamic, worthy of the vigorous and varied lives of our people and their multitude of interests.<sup>2</sup>

The "why" is almost impossible to tell, and artists usually talk about the

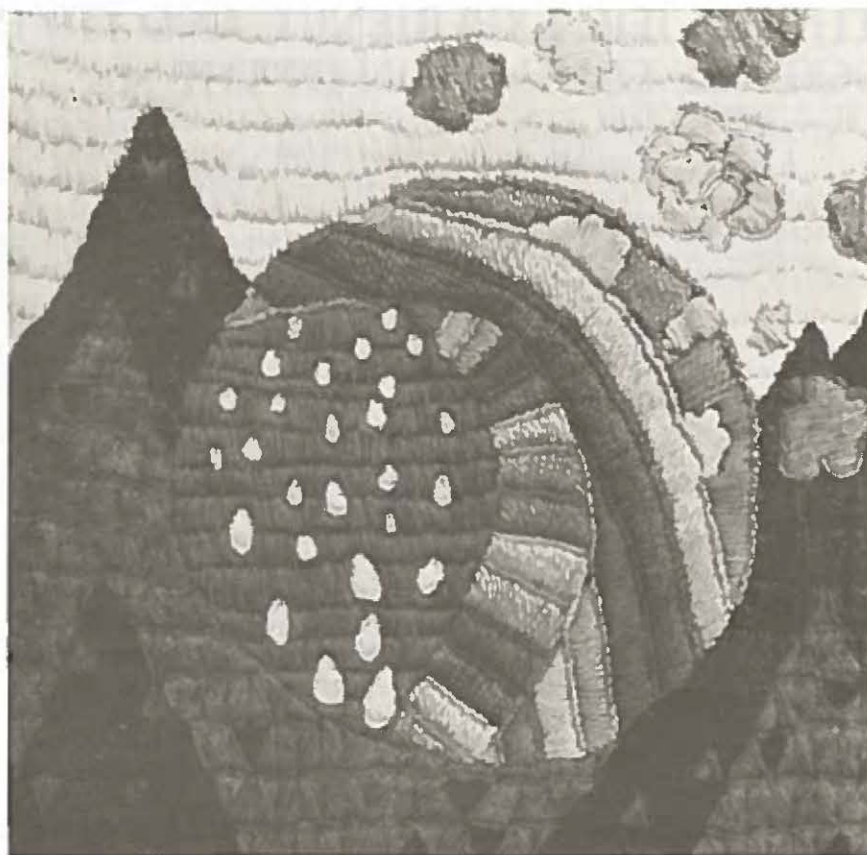
"what" and the "how." Additionally, this search for origin may be fascinating, but only satisfies the periphery of one's curiosity. Nevertheless, let us take this colorful direction for a moment. An example of how one of Hawai'i's art students quite simply borrows from the rich cultural background of his ancestors is shown in a pencil drawing by In-Hee You—a 1982 Hallmark winner, the highest regional award in two-dimensional art—in which he depicts an elderly oriental man engaged in reading a newspaper filled with Chinese characters. Beautiful and careful detailing make this drawing an exquisite composition, worthy of

such an award. More oriental influence in students' art at the exhibition is quite evident in such pieces as an exquisitely constructed *kimono*, a quilted textile painting of *kabuki* dancers, a ceramic bowl fired in the Japanese low-fire *raku* technique, or a large blockprint of a boy feeding *koi* (carp) at a pond. In the local exhibition, one does not find too much evidence of students borrowing themes or techniques from great European masters of the past. This trend is quite different from art entries of students from other parts of the United States, which, generally, are more traditional and western in style. The western technique that can be



noticed in the local exhibition is more contemporary. I vividly remember a striking pencil drawing of a popular rock star, a three-dimensional soft sculpture of a blue Volkswagen, and a superbly finished abstract sculpture molded of resin. Often students' work depicts people, places, and things intrinsic to Hawai'i, capturing the spirit of the Islands. At times, students make ceremonial reference to the traditional art forms of Hawai'i—probably without realizing it. Such an example in this year's exhibition is a lovely pencil drawing portraying a Polynesian woman with most dramatic details given to a *plumeria lei* she is wearing. A charming, yet different example of a proud Hawaiian tradition is a replica of the famous *Hokule'a*, the double-hulled canoe that traveled successfully from Hawai'i to Tahiti a few years ago. The model is made of rolled paper and twined with paper cordage. Silkscreened volcanic mountain silhouettes, batiked orchids, and embroidered rainbows, pictures of printed Hawaiian petroglyphs, reef fish, and cockfights, sumo wrestlers constructed from clay, pottery "plate lunches," and ceramic surfers on gigantic waves: these themes and more are typical products of the colorful and lively imagination of children's art in Hawai'i.

The purpose of allowing art students to produce works of this nature is well-reasoned: it creates genuine interest on the students' part, fosters caring and involvement, and, last but not least, develops pride in his work. After all, an art teacher's real contribution is to teach awareness, which inevitably leads to concern. The art program in the local schools show interest in keeping alive forms of ancient Hawaiian arts and the many other ethnic arts, along with artistically promoting new and unique art movements. Additionally, we cannot look at the art curriculum solely from the



Embroidery, JoAnn Hiranaga, University Lab School.

PHOTO BY VAL KROHN

conventional angle, i.e., painting, drawing, and sculpture, just as we cannot look at art works as isolated results divorced from context and community. When viewing art by local students, it becomes evident that their teachers stress universally good design, technique, and craftsmanship. Simultaneously, one realizes that the uniqueness of the local influence is inescapable.

Not all is perfect in art and art education in Paradise, but we know that what we have accomplished in the arts is unique and valuable for our community. We should cherish what we have received from Hawai'i's forefathers, should maintain what we have worked for in the recent past, and should strive for yet more visibility, responsibility, and art activity in all of the arts for our students in the future.

#### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Scholastic Art Awards 1982 Rules Book, Scholastic Incorporated, pp. 1-13.
- <sup>2</sup>George R. Ariyoshi. "Message from Governor George R. Ariyoshi," in *Hawaiian Wallhangings*, Amerika Haus Berlin, 1908. Catalogue accompanying traveling exhibition of weavings by Val Krohn.

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