

## IN PLEIN AIR



**Art  
STAGE**  
with Rasa Fournier

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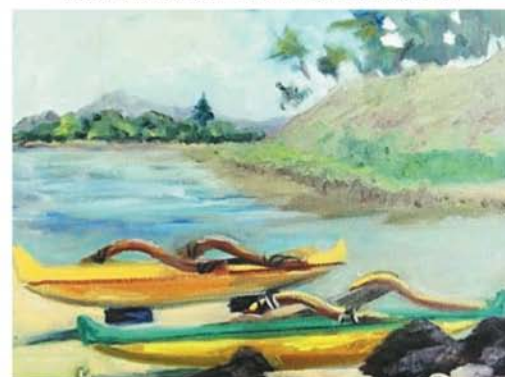


Mark Brown critiques the work of his plein air students during a Nov. 21 class on location at the canoe hale at Maunaloa Bay in Hawaii Kai. **BODIE COLLINS PHOTO**

(Below) Brown at the site of his just-completed giant mural fronting Nimitz Highway  
**PHOTO BY ANTHONY CONSILIO**



(Below) Painting by student Carol Yamashiro, at Maunaloa Bay



It's common at Kailua Beach to see an easel perched on the sand, its proprietor grasping a paint brush, peering out at the horizon, then dipping the brush and setting back to work on the canvas.

Such was the scene one Saturday morning at Haleiwa Beach Park, but rather than an easel here or there, an aesthetically vibrant array of them were scattered along the shore. The canvases were in various states of rendering the breathtaking view, where the Waianae mountain range met hues of sky and sea at Kaena Point. This was UH Outreach College instructor Mark N. Brown (marknbrownfineart.com) and his students who meet weekly to capture with paint the island's most picturesque views.

His classes have converged on Doris Duke's Shangri La, at Waialua Pioneer farm when the sunflowers are blooming, and at Chinatown's Kekaulike Market with its overabundance of visual vibrancy and movement.

"At the beginning of the semester, I make a list of 12 locations and I alternate be-

tween mauka and makai," says Brown. "Surf and turf — you get a little of both. Some artists might stay in the same areas all the time, but I think what happens is your work gets stilted. So I mix in some architecture, so you learn perspective. In a place like Kekaulike Market, you learn about color and gesture, with people walking back and forth."

Not only does he teach, but Brown's work also has been rented for the sets of all seasons of *Hawaii Five-0*. In addition to his smaller plein air canvases, he paints street-side murals, like the four-story-high, 350-foot-wide mural he and a team of four other artists whom he gathered just completed on Nishimoto Trading Company building fronting Nimitz Highway. Brown is hired to paint live at weddings, where he depicts the bride, groom and their reception and ceremony as guests mingle and watch him work. Realtors rent his paintings to beautify rooms of properties on the market. And his work has won top awards, including at the prestigious Maui Plein Air Painting Invitational.

Brown first became at-

tracted to creating beauty on two-dimensional surfaces as a kid. He'd watch some of his uncles draw cartoons. When his older brother enrolled in art classes at UH and came home with the requisite drawings of his hands and self-portraits, Brown became even more intrigued. Then his brother turned up with classic art books, including *Lust for Life* (about Van Gogh) and *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (about Michelangelo), accompanied by tantalizing descriptions about the Renaissance. By middle school, Brown was sketching his own comics. He also began borrowing books about the Renaissance, and by high school, he found himself at life-drawing gatherings, rendering the figures of live models beside college students. These weren't classes. The students each pitched in a few dollars to hire the model and they practiced their craft individually. Brown eventually began working in graphic design, making signs. With no solid formal training, just some workshops and plein air classes at UH Outreach College, he applied himself to turning out art whenever and wherever he

could. By 1998, he succeeded in becoming a full-time artist, and in 2000, he became a UH Outreach instructor. His work can be seen on his website and in galleries including Haleiwa Art Gallery and Cedar Street Galleries.

"When I first started painting," says Brown, "I would give away my paintings to friends, and they used it to hide the electrical box in their house. By the next year, I would give them paintings and they'd use it in the bathroom. After a while, my paintings started to go into hotel lobbies. It was a steppingstone (process)."

Brown says of all painting styles, he's most passionate about plein air. The outdoor environment accommodates his preference for a relaxed setting and dynamic scenery, above and beyond the usual ethic of sitting at concentrated attention in a home studio. Still, he does a bit of both:

"I would say my style is impressionistic. If I go on location and do a painting, I like to 'record' that — to be a reporter on the scene. And then when I come indoors, I do the editorial portion.

"When I go inside, there's a tendency to want to 'clean up' my work, and when you clean it up, you kind of kill some of that energy. So you have to say, well, that stroke that I put down doesn't need to be clean because it has energy, so let's see how we maybe can modify it a little."

At the recent Oahu Open Studios, where artists open their studios to the public, artist after artist referred to Brown as their initial and ongoing mentor. Brown's classes tend to book up quickly, and are made of equal parts students with no or little experience and regulars who have been taking his classes for a decade.

There was a huge boost of participation, he says, after 9/11: "It was like people were saying, 'Hey, life's short, let's go for it,'" he recalls.

Brown says even if his class books up, it's worth checking

in with him. He tends to have an extra easel, and paints and brushes on hand, and likes to make room for those who would like to try their hand at plein air. Registration is currently open for the upcoming Jan. 23-April 9 semester (outreach.hawaii.edu). Even between semesters, Brown meets regularly on Saturday mornings with a steady group of plein air enthusiasts at our island's most visually compelling locales. Meanwhile, Brown, who is always on a quest for new, stimulating venues and is all about challenging himself and others, is doing something unique this March. He'll be conducting a five-day plein air retreat at Camp Mokuleia (reservations due Jan. 15, campmokuleia.com), where attendees will try their hands at sunrises and sunsets, while meeting established artists and, in general, immersing themselves in art.