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Celebrating 175: Reuben Tam, Biographical Information and Resumes, 1944-1987

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Reuben Tam

Reuben Tam, Kauai-born painter and poet, began his studies in art at Kauai High School. His very first oil painting was of Haupu Ridge, seen through the window of the classroom. It was to be the first of countless landscape paintings done over the years by the artist in his life-long pursuit of "the spirit of place," an endeavor that was to take him eventually to distant mountains and coastlines--the Canadian Rockies, Alaska, the Bay of Fundy, and the Maine coast.

After receiving his degree from the University of Hawaii he continued his studies at California School of Fine Arts, Columbia University and the New School for Social Research. He lived in New York City for several decades, steeped in the life of the art world. He held 30 one-man shows, taught and lectured in museums and universities, and served on national art juries.

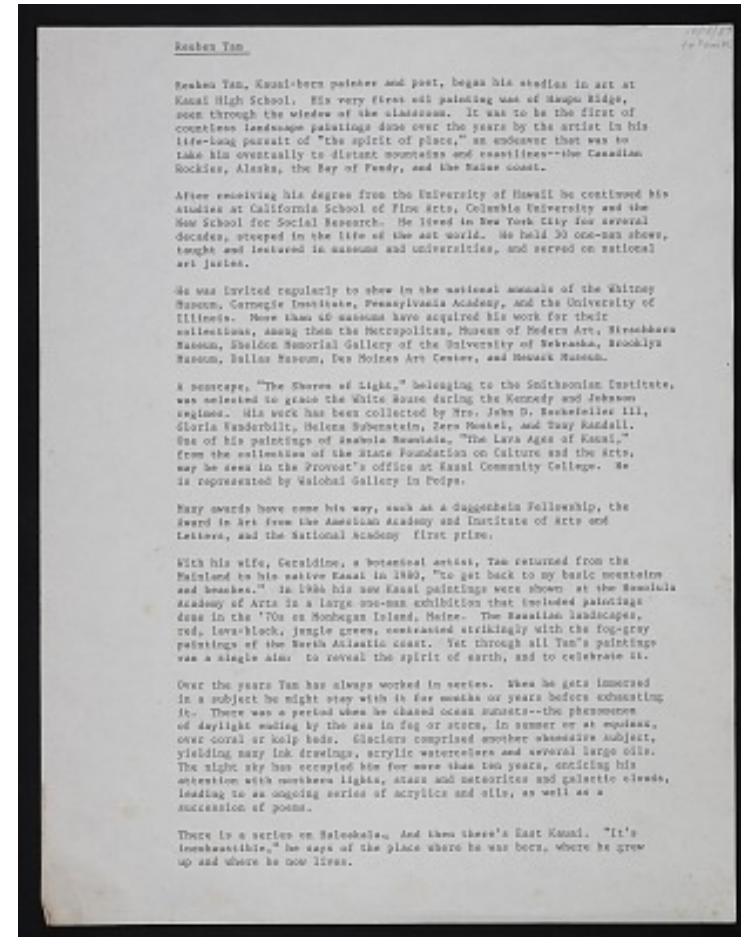
He was invited regularly to show in the national annuals of the Whitney Museum, Carnegie Institute, Pennsylvania Academy, and the University of Illinois. More than 40 museums have acquired his work for their collections, among them the Metropolitan, Museum of Modern Art, Hirschhorn Museum, Sheldon Memorial Gallery of the University of Nebraska, Brooklyn Museum, Dallas Museum, Des Moines Art Center, and Newark Museum.

A seascape, "The Shores of Light," belonging to the Smithsonian Institute, was selected to grace the White House during the Kennedy and Johnson regimes. His work has been collected by Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III, Gloria Vanderbilt, Helena Rubenstein, Zero Mostel, and Tony Randall. One of his paintings of Anahola Mountain, "The Lava Ages of Kauai," from the collection of the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, may be seen in the Provost's office at Kauai Community College. He is represented by Waiohai Gallery in Poipu.

Many awards have come his way, such as a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Award in Art from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and the National Academy first prize.

With his wife, Geraldine, a botanical artist, Tam returned from the Mainland to his native Kauai in 1980, "to get back to my basic mountains and beaches." In 1984 his new Kauai paintings were shown at the Honolulu Academy of Arts in a large one-man exhibition that included paintings done in the '70s on Monhegan Island, Maine. The Hawaiian landscapes, red, lava-black, jungle green, contrasted strikingly with the fog-gray paintings of the North Atlantic coast. Yet through all Tam's paintings ran a single aim: to reveal the spirit of earth, and to celebrate it.

Over the years Tam has always worked in series. When he gets immersed in a subject he might stay with it for months or years before exhausting it. There was a period when he chased ocean sunsets-- the phenomenon of daylight ending by the sea in fog or storm, in summer or at equinox, over coral or kelp beds. Glaciers comprised another obsessive subject, yielding many ink drawings, acrylic watercolors and several large oils. The night sky has occupied him for more than ten years, enticing his attention with northern lights, stars and meteorites and galactic clouds, leading to an ongoing series of acrylics and oils, as well as a succession of poems.



There is a series on Haleakala. And then there's East Kauai. "It's inexhaustible," he says of the place where he was born, where he grew up and where he now lives.

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