The Arthouse—Balancing Art & Commerce

by Don Brown, film curator, Honolulu Academy of Arts

The Arthouse at Restaurant Row, a cooperative venture between the Honolulu Academy of Arts and the Wallace Theater Corporation, was started on August 27 as a satellite theater programmed by the Academy’s film curator to showcase first-run foreign, documentary and independent features. Its purpose was to provide a forum for Academy events to the general public and to broaden the spectrum of so-called “specialty” product available to the Honolulu audience. For several years there had been grumbling among an informed segment of the population interested in film that they were being shortchanged by the variety and quality of the films being offered at the commercial theaters in Hawai‘i. Being the dominant chain in Hawai‘i for several decades, Consolidated Theatres (owned and programmed by the Pacific Theaters of California), was facing increasing competition from Signature Theaters (also owned and programmed from the mainland) and the Wallace Theater Corporation, both of which planned expansion in May, 1999.

This year the discontent reached a head at the announcement of Academy Award nominations in February when it became clear that many of the films had never played commercially here. However six of those films nominated as best American film (Gods and Monsters, Affliction) foreign film (Tango, Central Station) documentary (Dancemaker), and costume design (Velvet Goldmine) were already scheduled to play at the Academy Theater. In the words of Wallace Theatres vice-president Brett Havlik, “We noticed.” Talks between the Academy and Wallace Theater representatives began shortly afterwards.

Melding the philosophies of the two entities over the next few months proved a delicate balance. The intentions of the Academy as a non-profit and Wallace Theater as strictly for profit corporation both involved attracting people into the tent, so to speak, but for different purposes. The attraction of a cooperative venture for the Academy was for increased exposure in the general public and outreach to a community that may not be aware of the programs, exhibitions and facilities at the museum. To that end Wallace Theaters provides several means of exposure. Slide presentations before the feature begins are a regular practice at all Wallace Theaters. The Academy provided a slide for its Ehrenfeld exhibition and World Art Bazaar to be included in the presentation before the film in all Wallace Theaters. A kiosk outside the theater provides information on membership and Academy theater programs. Also, the Academy Theatre shows receive daily exposure in the major Honolulu papers’ film grid.

Wallace Theaters was facing direct

(Continued on page 3)
Passport to Hawai‘i’s History, Culture and Heritage

In cooperation with the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority (HTA), HMA recently produced a Passport to Hawai‘i’s History, Culture and Heritage for distribution at the American Dental Association (ADA) Convention in early October. Distribution of the Passport was handled by the Hawai‘i Visitors & Convention Bureau (HVCB). The ADA convention was the biggest convention Hawai‘i has hosted to date in its new Convention Center, with nearly 30,000 individuals in attendance.

The Passport features more than 70 museums, historic sites, botanical gardens, nature and cultural centers throughout the state which offer programs to visitors on a regular basis. Organized by island with maps showing the location of each site and illustrations by noted Hawai‘i artist Dietrich Varez, the Passport lists hours of operation, admission fees and a brief description of each site.

The purpose of the Passport is to encourage visitors to explore the many museums, historic sites, national and state parks, botanical gardens and nature centers where so much of our history and culture reside. Emphasis was placed on creating “a level playing field,” in which small museums would share equal visibility with larger attractions.

The first printing was done in limited quantity on a trial basis. HMA is now working with the HTA staff and HVCB on revising, reprinting and determining the method of distribution at future conventions.

Samples of the Passport were mailed to each of the participating museums in October. Until a second edition is printed, sample copies of the Passport are available by calling the HTA at 586-2550 or HMA at 254-4292. The Tropic Lightning Museum, Schofield Barracks in August 1999 as a museum technician. Mark, a graduate of Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, is no stranger to museum work. Mark has been in private business since 1993, but served as volunteer curator for the Erie Historical Museum and Erie County Historical Society. Prior to that he was curator of the Texas Maritime Museum in Rockport, Texas. Mark has also served as museum technician with the Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

Special Opportunity for Historians!

The Sally Kress Tompkins Fellowship, a joint program of the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) and the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), permits an architectural historian to work on a 12-week HABS project during the summer of 2000. The Fellow will either conduct research on a nationally significant building or site and prepare a written history to become part of the permanent HABS collection, or conduct research on a particular topic relating to architectural history in support of future HABS projects. The Fellow will be stationed in the field working in conjunction with a HABS measured drawings team, or in the HABS Washington, D.C. office.

The award consists of an $8,800 stipend. The 2000 Tompkins award will be presented during the Society’s 53rd Annual Meeting held in June in Miami, Florida. The award will be announced in the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians and the Newsletter of the Society after the presentation.

Applicants should be pursuing or have already completed graduate studies in architectural history or other related fields.

For more information and to download application forms, visit: http://www.cr.nps.gov/habsshaer/summerjobs.htm

Application deadline: February 4, 2000
competition from Signature Theatres only 2.5 miles away—a facility with twice the number of screens and almost three times the seating capacity. Their need was to broaden their base of appeal to a new market or face dwindling returns. What the Academy was able to provide besides knowledge of the art market and its distribution system is access to its over 6,000 Hawai‘i members through the calendar section of its bimonthly newsletter. They offered a discount to the members and also became a member of the Academy’s Business Council at the Benefactor level.

In fabricating an agreement, the Academy’s concern with image and presentation predominated; Wallace’s was mainly monetary. The variety of the Academy Theatre’s audience was an attraction for the Wallace Theatre representatives, and the the profile of people attending the theatres at Restaurant Row became noticeably different and much broader. The films selected for the theater for the first two months included documentaries (Genghis Blues, Buena Vista Social Club, Return with Honor); foreign films After Life (in Japanese), Three Seasons (in Vietnamese); and American independent features (The Adventures of Sebastian Cole, Sugar Town, Twin Falls Idaho). Young professionals nonplussed by subtitles, Japanese Americans and Japanese nationals on vacation, the Vietnamese community, and the military were among the groups attracted to these programs. A personal appearance by the filmmakers of Genghis Blues, winner of the audience award at the Sundance Film Festival, also raised the profile of the venture, attracting a younger university crowd and those seriously interested in film as an art form.

In fact, this venture revives the age-old conflict whether a new medium is viewed as an art form or simply as a generator of cash. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the distribution system and the method of scheduling films between the Academy and the Arthouse. Films are doled out to theaters around the country through distributors. Major studios tend to be their own distributors to keep the returns in-house, however many independent or foreign films rely on an outside distributor to circulate their film, make prints available, handle shipping, and market the film through publicity materials (posters, trailers, stills, etc.). These smaller distributors rely on “calendar” houses to maintain a steady flow of income while providing specialty product. The Academy Theatre falls into that category and has established a working relationship with such small distributors as part of the “arthouse circuit” around the country. Because the Academy programs are scheduled far in advance, films are locked into particular dates and are selected because of artistic merit, not necessarily commercial potential.

In the commercial arena several factors make such advance planning impractical or impossible. Because films are retained primarily on the basis of their popularity and whether they generate cash, distributors give priority to markets that are highly lucrative. Hawai‘i is relegated to a lower tier than major markets like New York, Los Angeles, or at least a dozen other mainland cities. If a film does well on the mainland, it is likely to be retained there for a longer period of time before being released to secondary markets. This is especially true in the case of “specialty” films which have fewer prints struck. Also, because of the demands of space and fluctuation of the product available in the commercial marketplace, lower priority is inevitably given to films with specialty appeal.

This inability to program commercial films two months in advance caused problems in letting Academy members know in the bi-monthly newsletter what would be played with certainty. Politics between the commercial distributor and exhibitor also came into play. One distributor servicing Wallace’s Restaurant Row Complex demanded a certain number of seats be made available at the complex for a (decidedly non-arthouse) film or threatened to move it and future product to the Dole complex. The only resolution was to switch the location of the art film to another venue three days before the play date, causing some confusion. Fortunately, the film, Return with Honor, programmed to coincide with Veteran’s Day, had a natural appeal to the military community on the island and the new venue was in the neighborhood of Hawai‘i’s largest Marine Corps base. The film did very well there and was eventually moved back to the Restaurant Row location.

In an ideal world all films presented at the Arthouse would have both artistic merit and be enormously popular, but as any exhibitor will tell you, this is the exception rather than the rule. In a democratic society popular taste tends to be aimed solidly toward the middle to be all things to all people. The non profit world has the luxury of not being ruled solely by the bottom line, but it also has the obligation not to be so esoteric that support dwindles.

Thusfar the films playing at the Arthouse have held their own, often surpassing the attendance of more “commercial” fare. (After Life, scheduled to run two weeks, was held over for five, for example). The mission of the Arthouse should be to provide a forum for creative work that speaks to those that want to be challenged and enlightened by it. The reality is that the films chosen must attract an audience to make the venture viable for the exhibitor—and there is pressure to find product that will perform accordingly. Hopefully those in charge of the commercial marketplace will be indulgent enough to let such a “non-profit-oriented” purpose find its niche and maintain a steadily growing number of patrons willing to seek out specialty product to justify its existence in a commercial forum.
Aloha, HMA members. I attended the Western Museums Association Conference held in Sacramento, California, September 22–26, 1999, as your Hawai‘i Museums Association delegate. There are ten state museum association delegates, including myself (HMA), serving on the WMA board. The Western Museums Association's mission is to “maintain and enrich the cultural life of our communities by vitalizing the role of museums in their dynamic interaction with the public and to empower museum professionals to create strong institutions by providing professional growth, interaction, and fresh ideas.” Part of its objectives and activities are to “further cooperation and communication among museums, museum worker and others interested in museums; to diffuse and increase knowledge through means of communication; to foster and support special training of professionals, intermuseum exhibitions and other forms of important public and professional museological programs.” An annual conference, usually held in the fall, is WMA’s main opportunity to fulfill its mission and objectives. The State representative has a minimum two-year term with specific duties. These duties include communicating state issues to the WMA Board and communicating regularly with constituents to sense their concerns, to identify issues, and to provide opportunity for involvement in WMA. As a WMA member, I also became directly involved with the inner workings of the association.

The pre-conference State Museum Associations workshop effectively presented the duties of a state representative. Delegates from nine states and several other WMA members attended this workshop at Vacaville Museum. Inspirational speakers included Helen Thomson, assemblywoman, for the 8th District (California) state assembly; Beverly Sheppard, acting director, IMLS; Rebecca Danvers, director of Research & Technology, IMLS; and Dan Burke, director, Utah Office of Museum Services.

Helen Thomson expressed the need for state museum associations to build a strong and active advocacy team. This team ideally would have the backing of its membership, both individual and institutional. She suggested that state associations persuade their state legislatures to enact bills favorable to museums, and that often working as an association is more effective than working as individual museums. She also recommended encouraging museum association memberships to write to their legislators suggesting that they promote museums and push for funding of museum initiatives. She advised that lobbying the general legislature, instead of individual legislators, can be more effective.

Barbara Sheppard and Rebecca Danvers voiced similar concerns at the national level. They stated that state associations should be a conduit for IMLS. As an association benefitting “museum” individuals and institutions, issues are presented generally. Both promoted the idea of state museum associations writing for grants that affect the association as an entire group with farther reaching impacts.

Dan Burke, director, Utah Office of
Museum Services and two other state representatives discussed “Winning State Support for Your Museum.” They talked about personal experiences in dealing with policies and funding at state levels. Some of the discussion highlights are listed below.

How Museums Can State Their Issues Effectively:

• Believe in museums’ ability to participate in community enhancement.

• Seek effective involvement in education ventures.

• Interact with state legislature.

• “Find a hook to hang initiative on”—take advantage of heightened conscientiousness of state legislature.

• Treat legislators as your most underserved audience, court them, involve and incorporate them into activities.

• Make effective evaluations a regular part of management and daily work assignments. Evaluations are most helpful when measuring the value of programs, etc.

Lessons learned from Utah group and Utah Office of Museum Services:

• Do not expect success your first time around—maybe the second or third.

• Speak as a unified voice (probably most difficult, but most beneficial).

• Present association museums as assets that can “fit into their agenda.” (Heritage preservation, community pride, local development, etc.)

• Position museum with event or agenda of legislatures’ initiatives.

Conference tips from state association representatives:

Utah Museum Association (UMA): Walkaway With A Website. This was a very successful pre-conference workshop resulting in conferees setting up a basic website and learning how to “maintain it.” Fee waiver for small museums.

Nevada & Washington: Both associations had legislators speak at their annual meeting.

Nevada: Know your audience. Include human element of museum professionals; how do we avoid burnout, reenergize.

Web information:

Rebecca Danvers, IMLS, study results. Museums Make a Difference: Lets Prove It. Copy requests to: rdanvers@imls.gov, Web: http://www.imls.gov/

SMA-L (State Museums Association Listserv): Discussion on-line group for museums. This is for general museum concerns. No cost for subscribing to SMA-L discussion list, however, there may be local service provider charges or connect charges for the electronic mail messages that you will receive. Check with your service provider or local computer support person. (I have instructions for setup, call (808)935-5021 or email: lyanwks@interpac.net)

Projects to look for:

IMLS National Interpretation Grant: IMLS doing a study with nine selected museums regarding interpretation. Results will help to develop standards and best practices of Interpretation.

AAM: AAM Communications Initiative “Kit.” The objective of the communication initiative is to educate those who influence or make public policy about the importance of museums to community. Target group—public policy makers, both elected and appointed, and the media. Focus is on local impact—impact on your state and local public policy makers and media people. (AAM member institutions received this in late September 1999. If you are a member institution and did not receive a kit, write to: American Association of Museums/attn: Nichole/1575 Eye Street Suite 400/ Washington D.C. 20005-1105. If your institution is not a member but is interested in receiving a kit, just include a check for $7.00 with your request. (Lyman House Memorial Museum has a kit, and director, Paul Dahlquist has used some materials and found it to be helpful.)

I found the WMA conference, overall, an excellent “ginko boloba, 2000 mg Vitamin C” supplement, a major energy picker upper. I think they picked me as their target audience, a mid-career “museumite.” The conference gave me a chance to make new friends, meet colleagues, build partnerships, and to actively participate in sessions and to select sessions that I normally would not. Representing HMA allowed me to look beyond my daily work role, and focus on the needs and concerns of our association and museums.

So, I encourage you, my fellow members, colleagues and museumites to attend conferences. Select sessions that are outside your field—pick them because they deal with museums in general. What a difference it will make. Uwe kalani, ola ka honua. Aloha nui, Lynn K. Manuel
LOCAL NEWS

Living History at the Tropic Lightning Museum

On 23 October 1999, the Tropic Lightning Museum at Schofield Barracks, Hawai‘i presented its first “Living History Day.” This public event featured restored military vehicles and living history re-enactors on the grounds of the Museum.

Eighteen members of the Hawai‘i Historic Arms Association donned uniforms, weapons, and equipment from the 1890’s to the Vietnam War era. The HHAA also presented an extensive display of US military weapons, uniforms, and equipment.

The Hawai‘i Military Vehicle Preservation Association provided five fully restored military vehicles for the display. The vehicles were a WWII Willys MB Jeep, tow 1950’s Willys M38 Jeeps and a Vietnam era M151A2 “Mutt” and M35A2 “Reo” 2 1/2-ton truck.

Additional displays included a WWII US Army field kitchen and a mock-up of a Korean War era MASH surgical tent which were set up near the Museum’s artillery pieces, Sherman tank and M-75 APC. The Hawaiian Military Insignia Collectors and Study Group presented a display of historic patches and crests.

The event attracted approximately 200 visitors ranging from veterans to young children. The children were particularly excited about the hands-on nature of the displays and enjoyed sitting in the vehicles and handling the weapons and equipment.

The Tropic Lightning Museum hopes to make “Living History Day” an annual event. For more information on this event please call Mark Weber at 808-655-0438.

AASLH Invites Nominations For 2000 Awards Program

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) invites nominations for its 55th annual awards program, in which it recognizes achievement in the preservation and interpretation of local, state, and regional history. This program is designed to recognize the accomplishments of individuals and organizations.

In 1999 the Kona Historical Society was awarded a certificate of commendation for its book A Guide to Old Kona. In 1998 Laupāhoehoe High & Elementary School was awarded a certificate of commendation for its book April Fool’s...The Laupāhoehoe Tragedy of 1946. In 1997 the Judiciary History Center received an Award of Merit for its work in preserving and interpreting the judicial history of Hawai‘i.

The award of merit is presented for a performance deemed excellent compared with similar activities nationwide. The certificate of commendation is presented for excellence within the context of available means and regional standards.

For further information about the 2000 awards competition and nomination forms contact the state awards chair, Joan Hori, at Hamilton Library, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa; phone 956-9296; e-mail jhori@hawaii.edu. Nomination forms are also available from Dr. Marie Strazar, History and Humanities Program, State Foundation on Culture and the Arts; call 586-0771.

Kaleikou—A Partnership in Downtown Honolulu

Kou is the ancient name of Honolulu Harbor and its vicinity. Kaleikou is a lei of museums and historic sites located in downtown Honolulu. This new partnership was first organized to facilitate the exchange of information about each organizations activities. The group includes the Hawai‘i State Library, the Honolulu Police Department Law Enforcement Museum, ‘Iolani Palace, the Judiciary History Center, Kawaiaha‘o Church, the Mission Houses Museum, Native Books and Beautiful Things, the Richards Street Y.W.C.A. and Washington Place.

One of Kaleikou’s first projects was creating a “passport” for this year’s downtown Honolulu annual open house, “A Capital Day Down Capitol Way.” Visitors visiting all of the participating sites got their “passports” stamped and received a complimentary pocket Hawaiian Dictionary from Native Books and Beautiful Things. During a planning meeting the group discovered that many of the sites had ties with Queen Lili‘uokalani. She was a member of the Y.W.C.A., her Kingdom’s Police Force was the last department to yield to the revolutionary powers that later became the Provisional Government, she was the choir leader and organist at Kawaiaha‘o Church, she lived in both Washington Place and ‘Iolani Palace, and she spoke to the legislature in Ali‘iolani Hale. Since some of Kaleikou’s membership already commemorated the Queen’s birthday every September, all of the sites agreed to honor her birthday jointly this year with special activities.

The group is working on producing a brochure listing activities at all sites. These ventures remind us of the ‘ōlelo no‘eau, Hui aku na maka i Kou. The friends will meet at Kou.

NOMINATION FORMS

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Nominations and supporting documentation are due to Joan Hori by March 1, 2000.
Fellowships Offered for AAM Annual Meeting

The American Association of Museums administers an annual meeting fellowship program to support and encourage the participation of museum professionals from diverse backgrounds and small museums to attend the annual meeting, May 14-18, 2000, in Baltimore, Maryland. All fellowships include complimentary registration to the meeting, and some offer a travel stipend up to $500.

To be eligible, applicants must fulfill one of the following criteria:

- Full- or part-time employment at a small museum with a budget of less than $350,000
- Be a museum professional of diverse background (based on race/ethnicity, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, or physical abilities)
- Be a full- or part-time student majoring in historic preservation or allied subjects such as American studies, anthropology, archaeology, architecture, art history, history, planning, or scientific conservation
- Be a volunteer or docent at a historic house museum

Application forms for AAM fellowships will be available in January. Please send your name, complete mailing address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address to: Annual Meeting Department, American Association of Museums, 1575 Eye St. N.W., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005-1105; fax 202/289-6578; e-mail: sfoley@aam-us.org.

The selection committee encourages applicants from all types of museums. Preference will be given to applicants who have not previously attended an AAM annual meeting, or have not been a past fellowship recipient. In order to receive an annual meeting fellowship, you must be a member of AAM.

Visit AAM’s New Web Sites

The American Association of Museums (AAM) announces two new Web sites features that assist museum professionals: Museum Marketplace Online, a directory of companies that supply products and services to the museum market; and, Aviso Employment Resources Online, where you’ll find a sampling of job listings from Aviso, AAM’s monthly newsletter. Both features can be found on AAM’s Web site: www.aam-us.org.

Museum Marketplace Online is a new resource for museum products and services available to anyone with access to the World Wide Web. The site contains information on hundreds of companies that supply museum products and services. To get to this section, just click on the Museum Marketplace Online icon on the AAM home page (www.aam-us.org). Companies may be found alphabetically, by product category, or by location.

Aviso Employment Resources Online can also be accessed from the AAM home page by clicking on the Aviso Employment Resources Online icon. If you institution is interested in having a job posted on the AAM Web site, simply place an ad in AAM’s monthly newsletter, Aviso. For a surcharge of $25 or 10% of the cost of the print ad, your ad will also be posted on Aviso Employment Resources Online.

Smithsonian Offers “Diversity, Leadership, and Museums” Seminar

The Smithsonian’s Center for Museum Studies announces the annual seminar, “Diversity, Leadership, and Museums,” to be held March 13–17, 2000 at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Application deadline is January 14, 2000. This annual program explores diversity issues in museums and provides training opportunities for enhancing leadership skills and competencies. Throughout the seminar, held at the Smithsonian Institution, participants will gain a broader view of the museum field and make connections to a network of colleagues. The long term goal of the program is to expand the diversity of museum staff in leadership positions. The program targets the career development needs of under-served community members working in all disciplines and functional areas of the museum.

For more information and application process, please contact Karen Cooper, Center for Museum Studies, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560-0427; 202-633-8991; fax: 202-357-3346; e-mail, kcooper@cms.si.edu.

The Smithsonian’s Center for Museum Studies invites proposals from experienced museum staff to the Fellowships in Museum Practice, a professional development program intended to address important issues in museum operations. Proposals are due by February 15, 2000 for projects beginning the following October. For further information and application process contact Nancy J. Fuller, Center for Museum Studies, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560-0427; fax: 202-357-3346; e-mail, fmp@cms.si.edu; or visit their website: www.si.edu/cms/fmpcov.htm.

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JANUARY


15 IMLS, General Operating Support grants; www.imls.gov/grants

FEBRUARY

1 NEH, Planning, scripting, implementation, production grants (Public Programs); www.neh.gov/grants

MARCH

15 MAP (Museum Assessment Program), AAM & IMLS, www.aam-us.org

The Hawai‘i Museums Association is a non-profit corporation dedicated to communication and cooperation among the staffs and supporters of Hawai‘i’s museums.

Membership is open to all individuals, educational institutions, historical organizations and museums interested in the growth and development of the museum profession and its activities in the State of Hawai‘i.

To apply for individual membership, send a check for $35 with your name, address/zip code, home and business phone numbers, organization and your position title to: Hawai‘i Museums Association, P.O. Box 4125, Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96812-4125. Institutional applicants should call Deborah Pope at 808/254-4292 as rates vary. Information on membership is also available on our web site http://openstudio.hawaii.edu/hma/

Hawai‘i Museums Association
P.O. Box 4125 Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96812-4125

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