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Journal

Places, 8(2)

ISSN

0731-0455

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Publication Date

1992-10-01

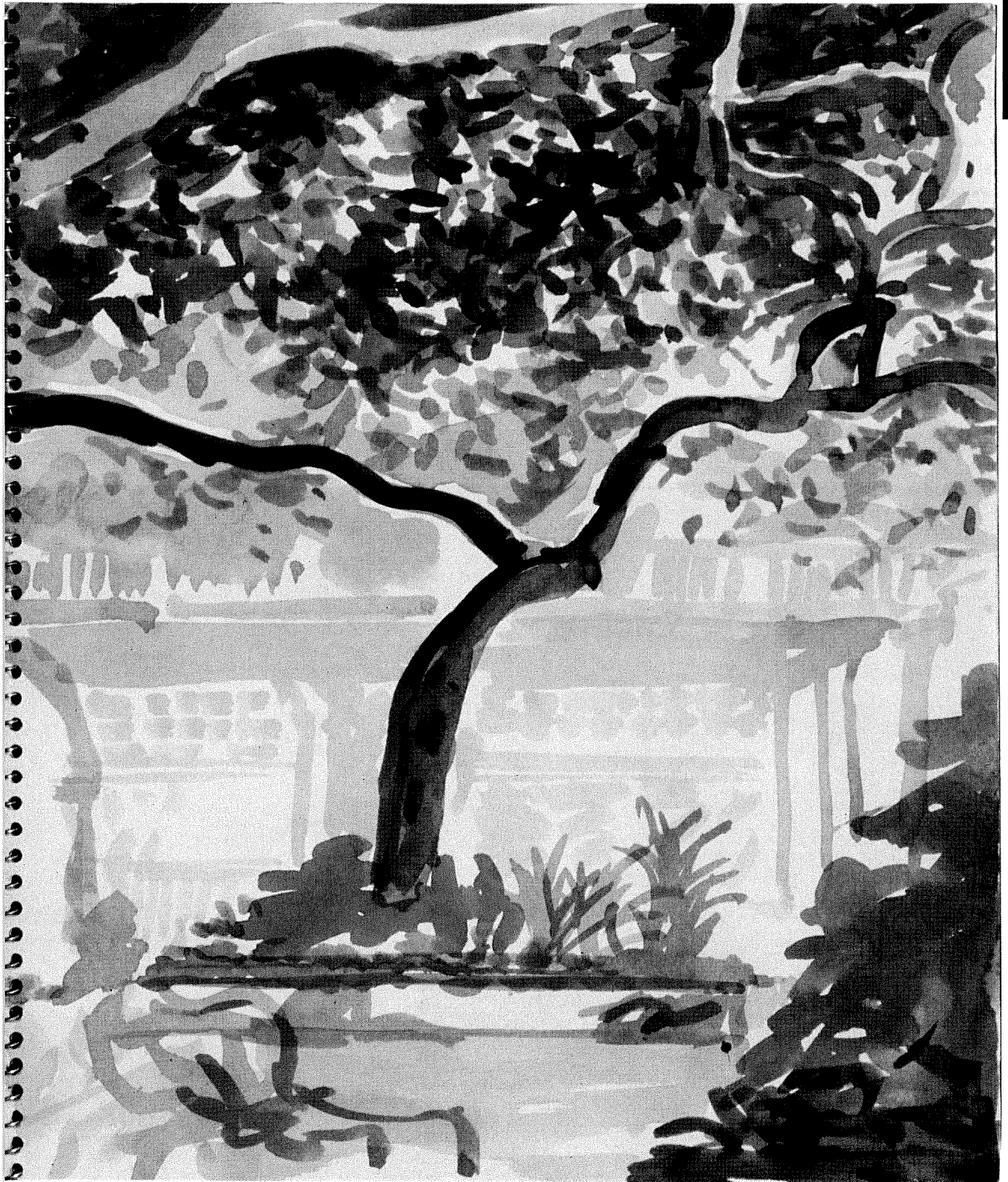
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Portraits of Haleiwa

Randolph T. Hester, Jr.



Imagined portrait of the Haleiwa Hotel, demolished years ago but considered still existing by local people.



Paintings by Randolph T. Hester, Jr., and Nathaniel C. Hester.

During the past year our firm worked on a plan for Haleiwa, Hawaii, one of the few small villages on the island of Oahu that have retained their traditional rural character. In the past Haleiwa and the North Shore were protected by their remoteness from the suburbanization that spread out from downtown Honolulu into central Oahu. But no longer. Five destination resorts, complete communities and suburban developments are being planned or in review for the North Shore at present. Change is coming, which prompted Councilwoman Rene Mansho to call for a long-range plan for the area, hence our involvement.

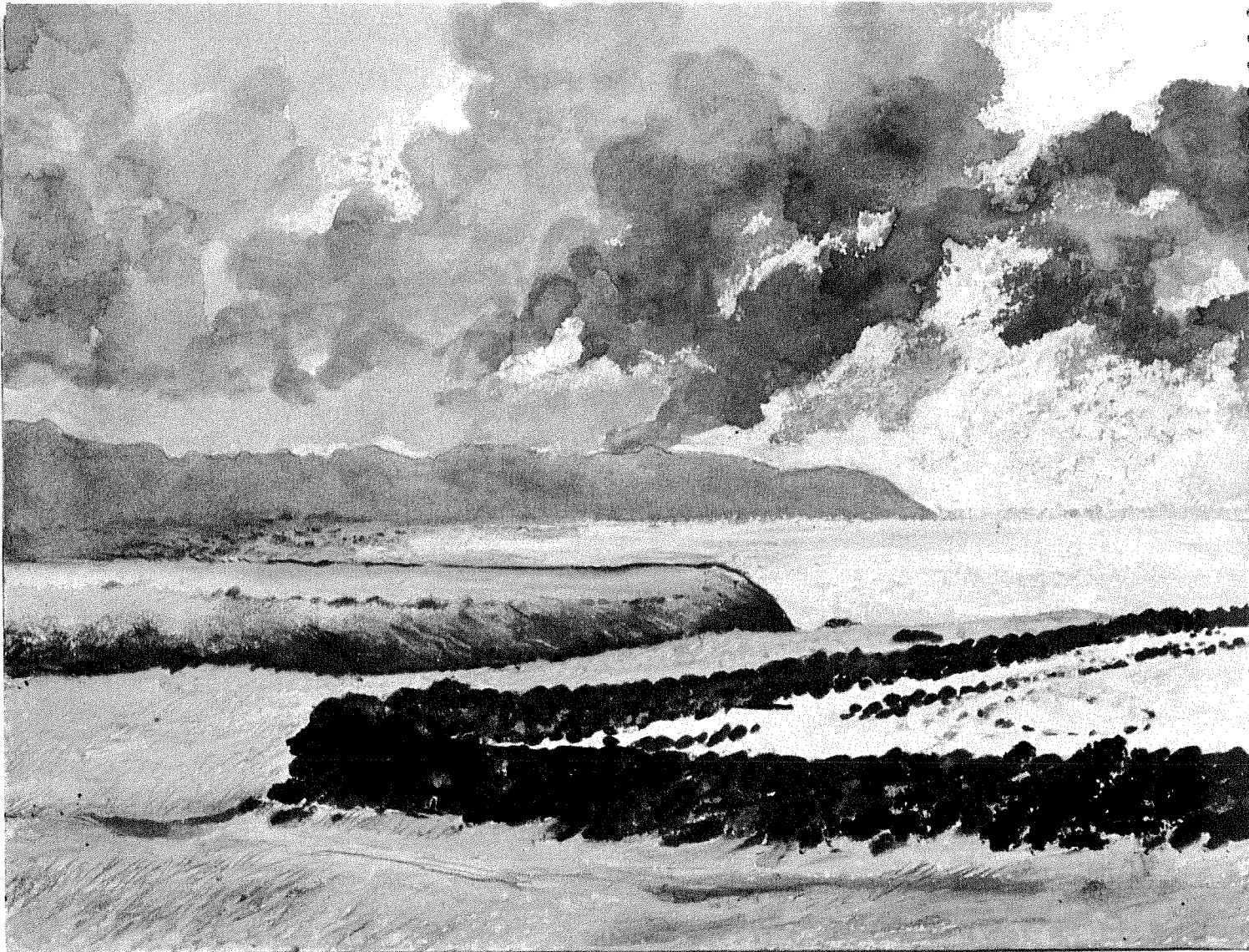
This writing is not about the plan; rather it is about coming to know the place more intimately by painting on site. While in Haleiwa to work on the plan, I often painted with my son Nate, who is sixteen. On weekends we would pack a lunch and walk or bike to a spot and paint. Or we would paint after work, at a *luau* or a concert. For us painting is like one-on-one basketball, except our fine motor skills are more equal than our gross motor skills. From our painting sessions, a partial portrait of Haleiwa emerged.

The Puu O Mahuka Heiau (a *beiau* is a sacred place to Hawaiians) marks time and space three hundred feet above and two lava flows removed from Haleiwa. Although the town and the temple have been linked for cen-

turies, Puu O Mahuka must have always been a place apart. The precision of its sunset alignment and the audacity of its rock-walled expanse (it stretches more than five hundred feet towards the sea) separate it from the everyday.

Puu O Mahuka's history grants it mythical power. Here Kaopulupulu, said to be the wisest man in the whole kingdom, presided as *kabuna* (a prophet or priest in ancient Hawaii). Up the sheer cliff believers brought lava stones sized in proportion to the prophecy they sought.

Throughout its history this *beiau* has been associated with sacrifice. Two hundred years ago three men from an



Puu o Mahuka Heiau looking to Kaena Point in the winter.

expedition led by English Explorer George Vancouver were captured on the island, and many believe that they were sacrificed here. The blood-red color of the soil cannot be escaped when painting. It was here that Pele, the spirit of volcanoes, turned her faithful followers into stone so that they might be immortal. Their lava personages rise three times human height at the water's edge below. When Kaopulupulu was murdered by his own king, who was jealous of his wisdom and power, he uttered a last prophecy: The kingdom would be invaded by foreigners. The invasion occurred within the year and has continued incessantly since his death.

On the summer day that Wayne Holu, our Haleiwa friend and teacher, brought Nate and me here it was brilliantly sunny, a day of birth. It was hard to imagine death as Wayne pointed out Kaena Point, a place where souls depart from this earth by jumping from the leaping rock into everlasting night. But when I made a sketch in January, the sky above Kaena Point was heavily laden with dark clouds of mourning, and Kona winds blew cloud fragments into the blackness. I thought that I saw my uncle, wrapped in Payne's gray, leap through the whiteness of the sun.

One day we began sketching at Matsumoto's Shave Ice early in the morning as the family prepared to open for business. Nate focused on the 8:30 a.m. quiet of the building, an old structure, not grand but elegantly utilitarian in its adaptation to the climate. The east-facing roof overhang and trees on the south and west provide cool air that is circulated through the building by a double-size entry and an open back door. Sketching helped us understand those kinds of building nuances, so important to the town's character.

We also observed that in spite of Haleiwa's local historic, scenic and cultural ordinance, much of what makes the built environment special is illegal. Many of the old buildings don't meet



building codes, many are too close to the street to satisfy setback requirements (just in case someone wants to widen the present twenty-foot street to sixty feet), and zoning doesn't allow both manufacturing and retail in numerous places where they have occurred for generations. Although Nate usually tunes out my ranting about such things, this interested him.

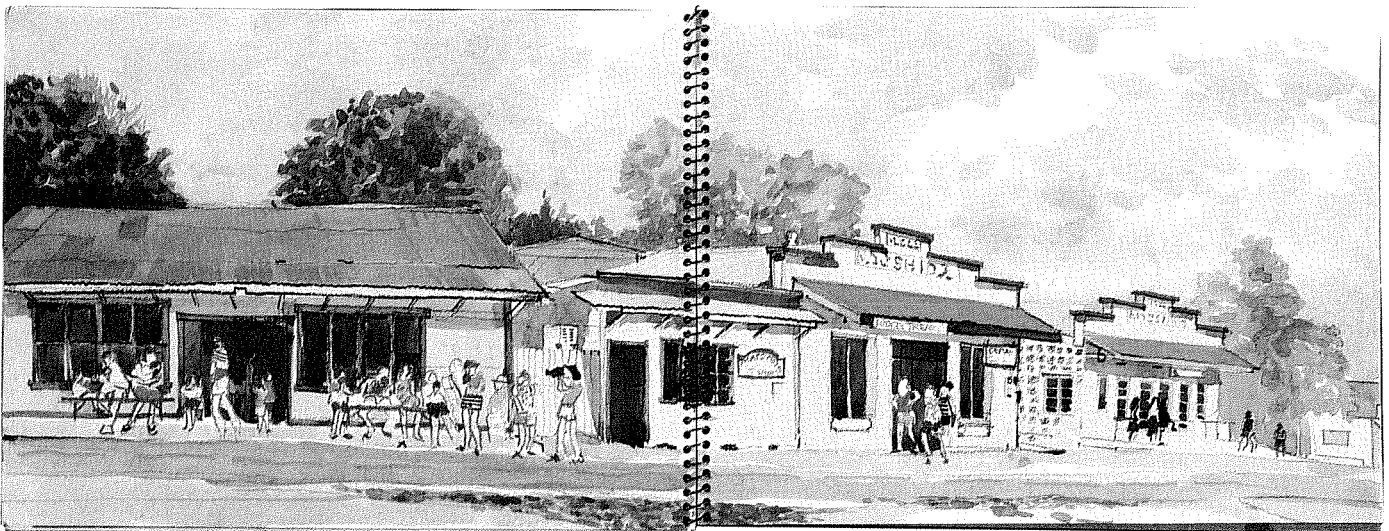
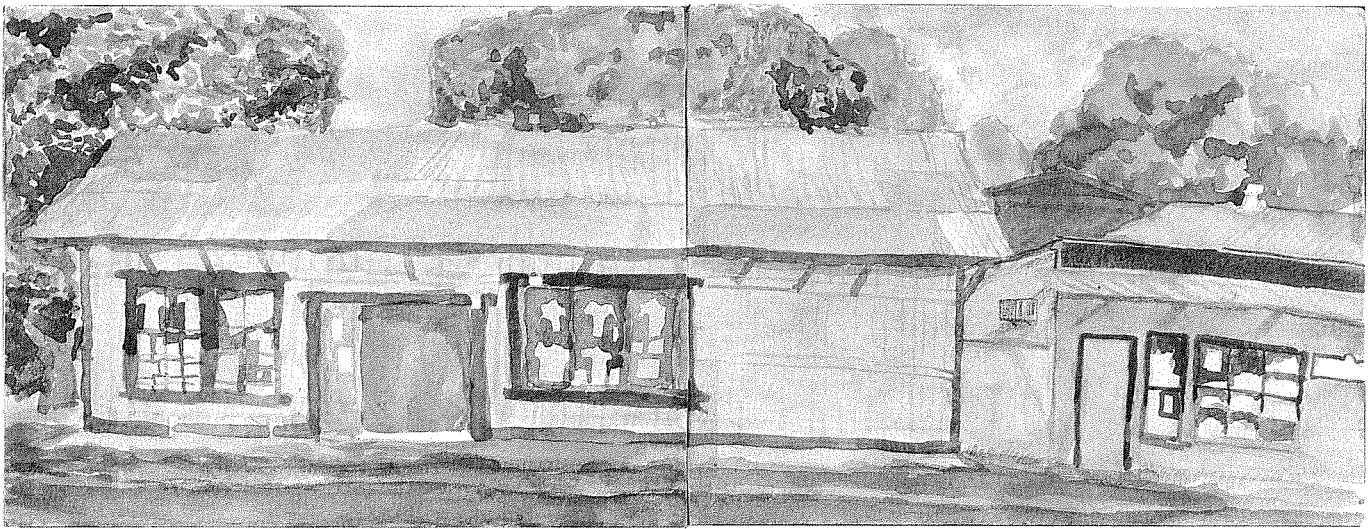
By 9:30 a.m. the quiet scene was transformed; tourists swarmed Matsumoto's. Stan Matsumoto estimates that he sells 326,400 shave ices a year, half to out-of-state tourists. They line up to be served, then sit outside at every available spot to eat. Cameras click and videos roll, capturing the joy of melting shave ice. But we noticed something else. The climate control devices now served a social purpose as well. In addition to cooling, the over-

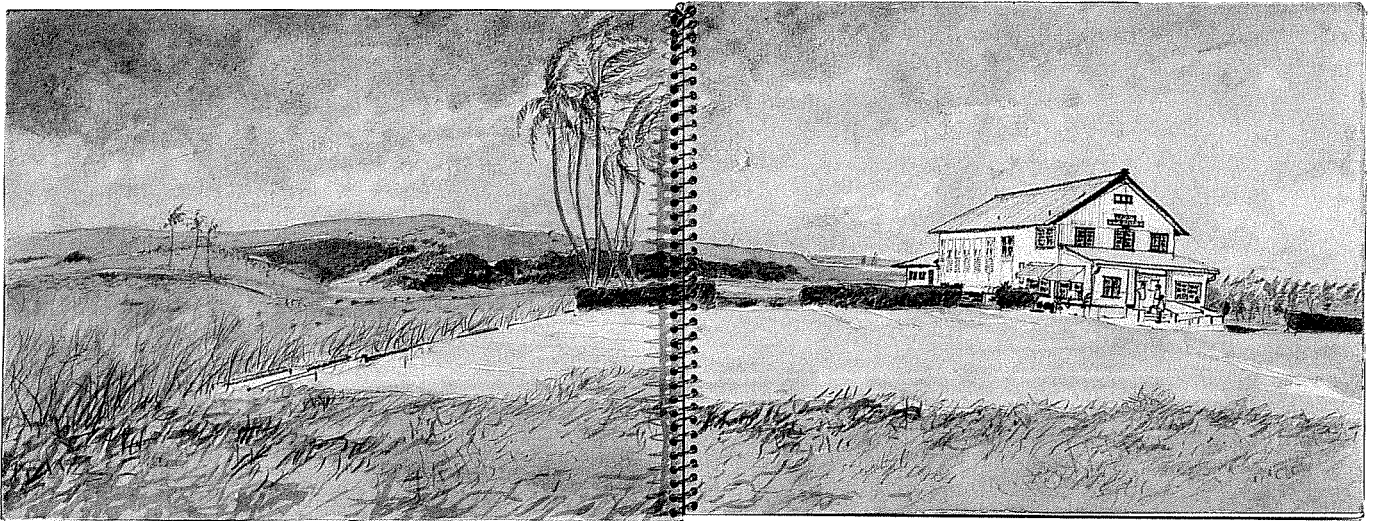
sized door invited one inside the building, and the roof overhang provided six feet of deep shade, the perfect spot to socialize with friends or strangers.

This architectural pattern for cooling is repeated in almost all of the older buildings lining the mile-long stretch of Kamehameha Highway that serves as Haleiwa's main street. Commercial and public buildings face and hug the street, maintaining east-west air circulation through the structures and creating places at the street to meet by chance, swap news and linger. It is these places that encourage an informal, daily, shared community life. In contrast, newer buildings are set back from the street, often with parking in front, and opt for air conditioning. How much of a sense of community is dependent upon an environment that encourages shared daily life patterns?

Top: Matsumoto's Shave Ice at 8:30 a.m.

Bottom: Matsumoto's and the Yoshida buildings after 9:30 a.m.





Another set of shared activities revolves around the Waiialua Community Association building (WCA) and the post office. As in most small towns, a trip to the post office or bank, grocery, or hardware store creates community; one not only picks up mail, money, or food but also runs into friends and catches up on the news. The WCA, long a community tradition, houses diverse activities and serves every generation of the town. It is not unusual for seniors to be playing cards in the WCA gym while a teen shoots basketball at the other end of the court. You notice each of these interactions if you paint in one place for half a day. Most would be missed on a short site reconnaissance.

The activities here are distinctive. Unlike most small towns, Haleiwa is served by frequent bus service that circles the island and creates nodes of intense activity along the way. At the bus stops in front on the Haleiwa post office there frequently are as many as a dozen people waiting or socializing. Several people spend almost all day, every day, sitting at these bus stops, never riding the bus. They create a familiar community scene.

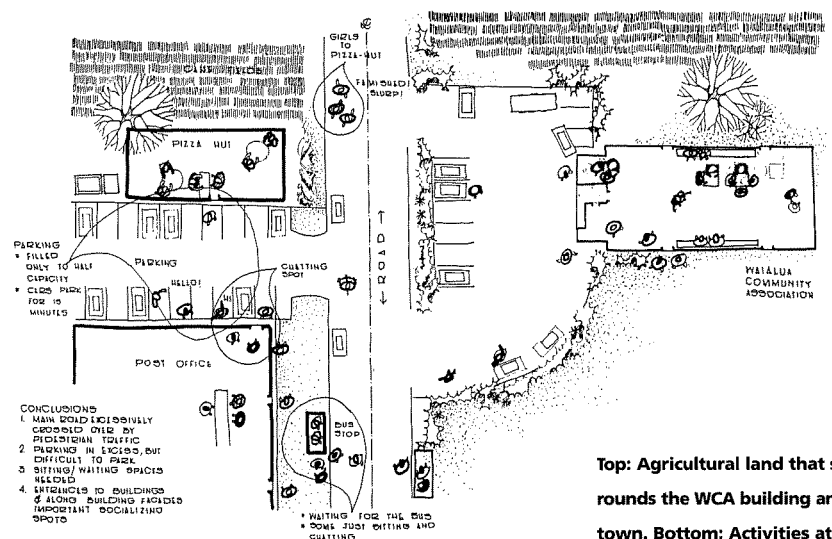
Outside the WCA, agricultural land leads from the back door as far as the eye can see. One of the most distinctive aspects of Haleiwa is that it is so clearly defined by agricultural lands. More than 10,000 acres of sugar cane create town limits to the north, south and east; and there is pineapple

beyond that. A field six acres wide on both sides of Kam. Highway uniquely delineates the center of town. This clarity of rural character defines the place and has touched the souls of local people. Years ago, concerned that the rural lifestyle was threatened, they mounted a campaign to “keep the country country.” Bumper stickers still proclaim the message.

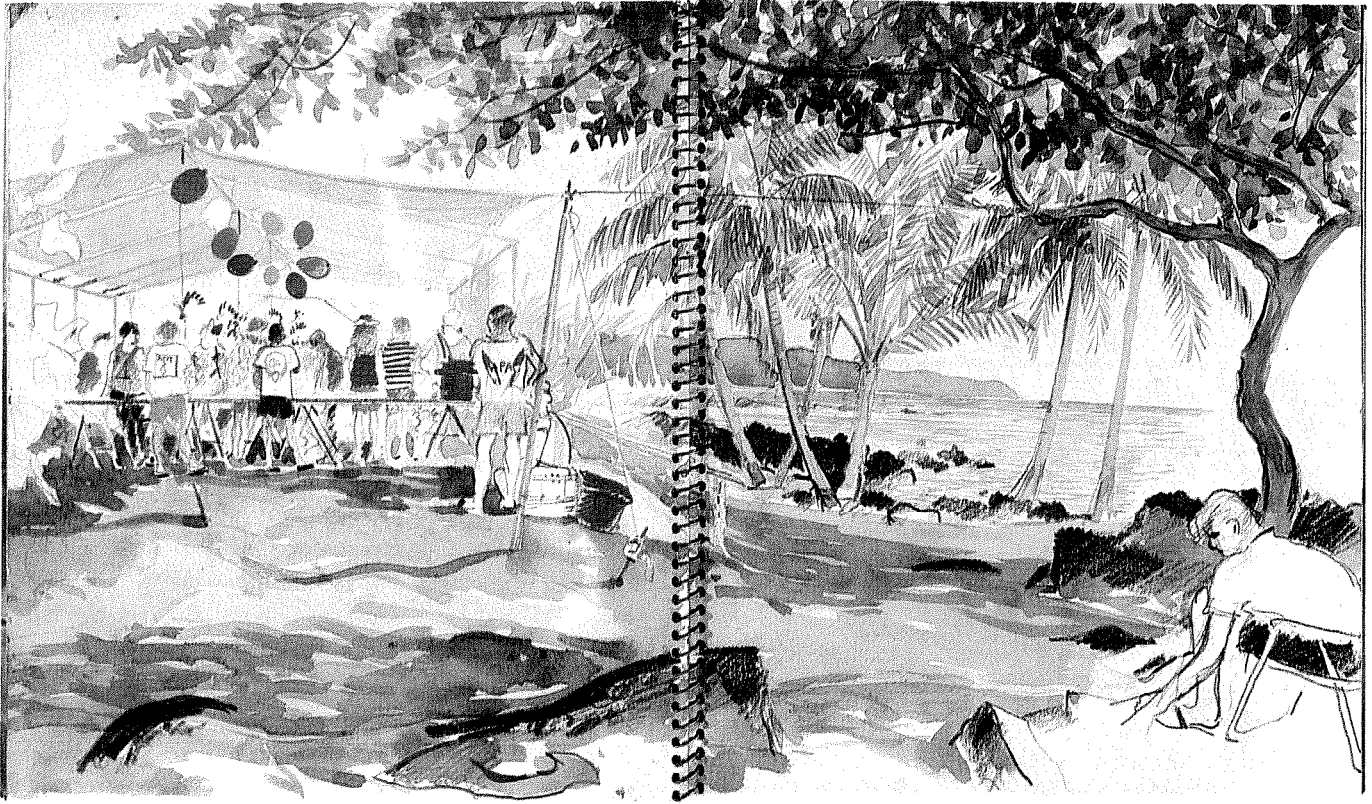
Given their sacredness, one might think these lands that stretch the eye beyond the horizon are surely safe. But agricultural land is valued at \$30,000 per acre. Rezoned, the land becomes resort or commercial real estate worth \$3 million per acre. What is the spiritual character on a place worth? Will it be lost for want of visionary public

leadership or sold off to vested interests in return for unneeded trinkets? Underscoring the importance of the agricultural land, the only traffic signal in town halts traffic on Kam. Highway to allow cane hauling trucks to pass from the fields to the mill. These cane fields sit like an inside-out town square in the geographic center of Haleiwa with a traffic signal icon for a spire.

Otherwise the geometry of Haleiwa’s landscape is straightforward. There is no city hall, and the library is in Waiialua. Kam. Highway forms a north-south axis, with an inspiring view on either end. Southward to the Wainae Mountains clouds congregate. Northward, a view to the ocean is afforded by a slight deflection of the



Top: Agricultural land that surrounds the WCA building and the town. Bottom: Activities at the bus stop and post office. By Nathaniel C. Hester and Ekta Gyani.



Temporary architecture at the luau for Greg Noll.

highway at Matsumoto's. In Haleiwa seasons are distinguished not by snow or fall color, but by the height of the waves. The mountains in the distance create a sense of enclosure, but not a feeling of claustrophobia. Rivers, wetlands and springs make a strong form that is vulnerable to change, a geometry at once powerful and fragile, simple and idiosyncratic. This landscape creates a magic longing to be nurtured. One local minister told us, "We must keep god on our side by being the stewards of the beauty of this place."

At a smaller scale, there is a crisp geometry to the built landscape that takes on organic form in one growing season. A fence or wall or building or field grows green, then makes a pattern of green on green on green. We became aware of this after several weekends, when our green watercolors were depleted. This green on green provides more than visual poetry. It also provides subsistence, the banana, papaya, taro, macadamia nuts, pineapple, coffee and numerous edibles that have no English name. The layered green also provides religious metaphor like the night blooming cereus at Liliuokalani Church.

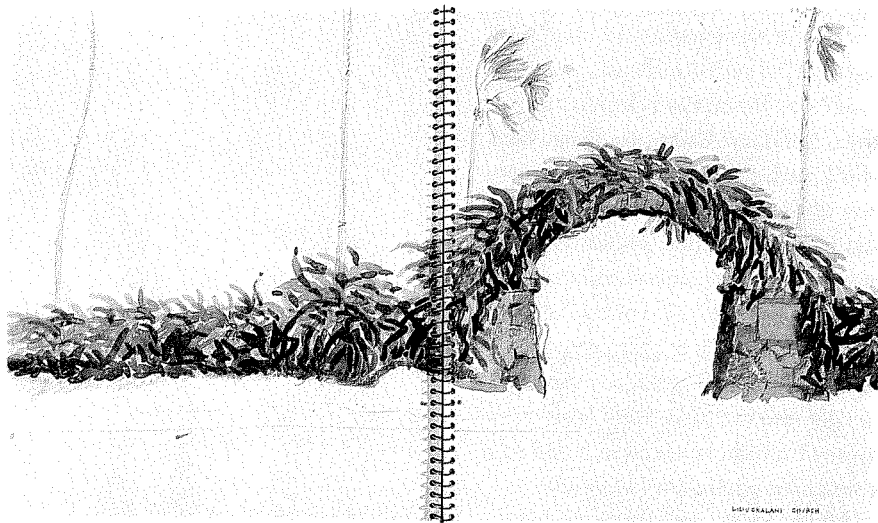
Several places that no longer exist are also sacred to local people. The Haleiwa Hotel is one such "ghost" building. People talk about it as if it still exists although it was demolished decades ago. They still honeymoon, work and vacation there, if only in their memories. I have only seen pictures and the remnant on the gateway, but I imagine it elegant with architecture and landscape speaking in understated unity.

There is a tradition of making the things one needs locally. Proportional to its population, the town contains more than twice the manufacturing employment as the state as a whole. The food and clothing made in Haleiwa provide a long-term strategy for allowing people to continue to live and work in Haleiwa. Miura's store has produced elegant everyday clothing for sixty-five years. Presently four generations of family workers are often in the store at the same time (the youngest is less than a year old and doesn't sew yet). But Jane Oda's family makes more than shirts, they make a sense of history shared by the town and they create community. Miura's store is part of the sacred structure of Haleiwa.

Kaopulupulu's last prophecy has been realized over and over in Haleiwa. Invasions were followed by immigrations, and an environmental record of each human influx remains, creating a layering of cultural artifacts in the landscape.

The Bon Dance at the Shingon Mission is a Buddhist service held to pay respect to the ancestors. Although the initial ceremony is attended primarily by Japanese-American Buddhists, it is open to all, and the dance itself is a community event. The circle dance invites everyone to join in, and they do — a rainbow of races, ages and abilities. It seems to be a celebration of the present as well as the past. It builds community. The ceremony of respect lingers with me; one of my daily rituals is now a prayer accompanied by lotus-formed hands. If you observe carefully enough to paint, you learn much about places and people different from yourself.

The old Hawaiian tradition, *luau*, likewise creates community. Friends, a tent, food, live music. No opportunity for a *luau* is missed, the church anniversary, Lono's birthday, a child's first year, the return of a friend. Gilda had a five-day party. Hanalei Preece gave a sit-down *luau* for Greg Noll at

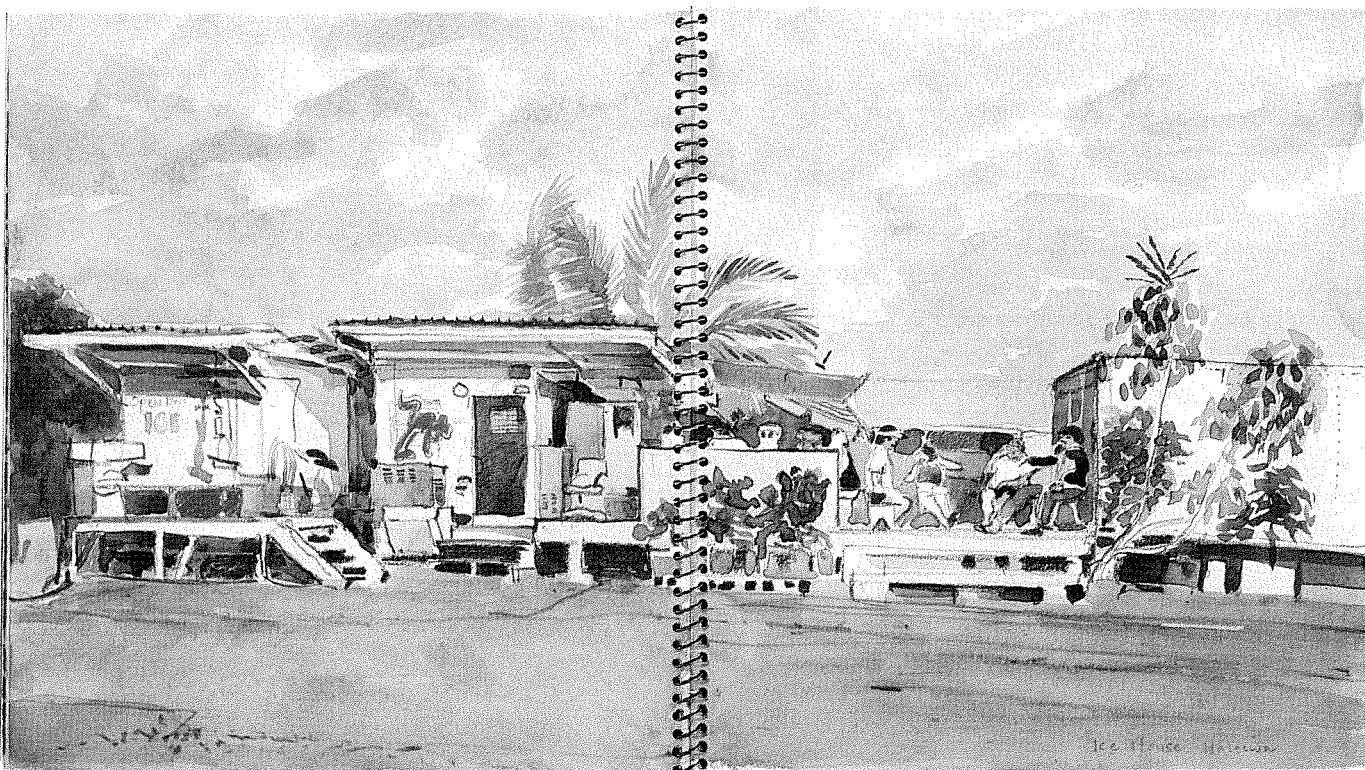


Green on green cactus at Liliuokalani Church.

Barney Oga's place. The two of them lived in a grass shack forty years ago when they pioneered modern-day long-board surfing and became championship surfers. This was no power lunch for dealmaking, no social climbing cocktail event; instead, there was togetherness, sharing. Even strangers couldn't be left out. There was laughter and talking, handshakes, and hugs and kisses.

Locals express the quality of their lives through a saying: "no rush rush," said slowly. Life in Haleiwa moves not like a rat race or even a clockwork, but rather at the slow pace of a con-

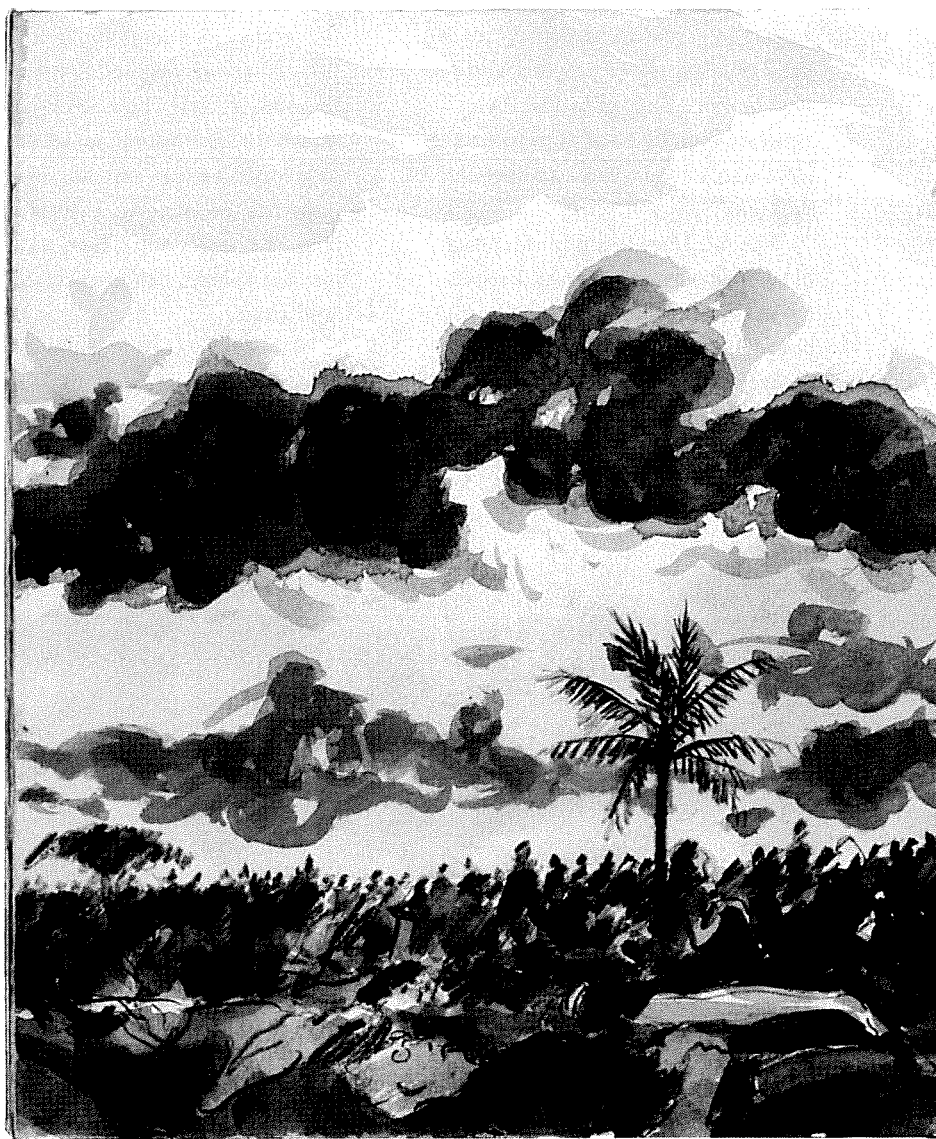
The ice house.

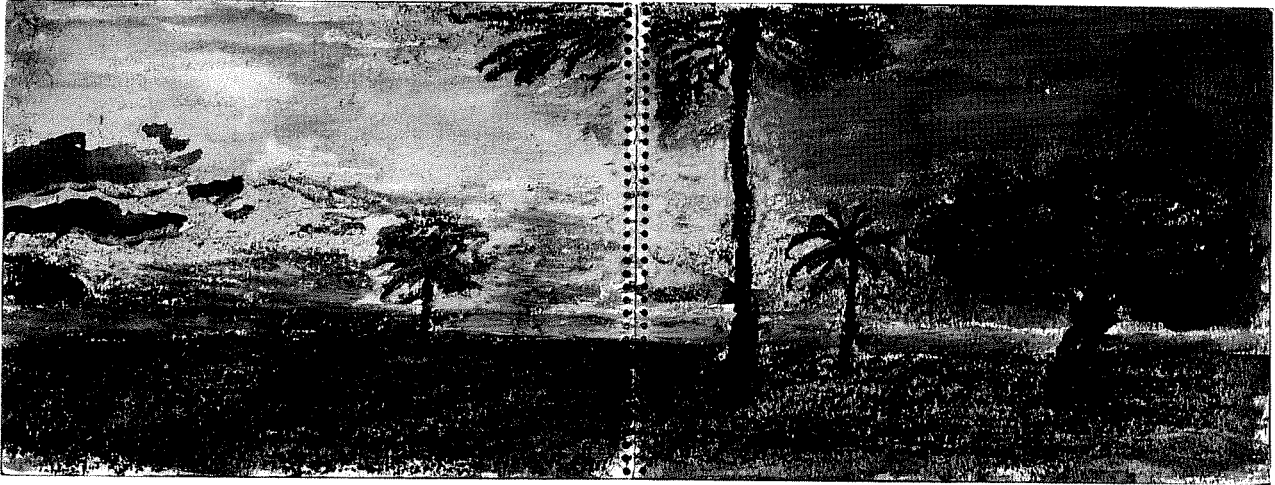


versation among people being together. Such being together can usually be found at Barney's Ice House, where ice is sold and friendship is kept between *luaus*. Lono and Kalani are there. One of the *haole* girls is *hapai*, so the major flow of the conversation is about pregnancy. Being together and the conversation that accompanies it cannot be rushed. Voice mail won't substitute, nor can you bill it in quarter-hour increments. If you paint, however, you can get into the pace. How many pages of fax can be received in the time it takes the watercolor sky to dry?

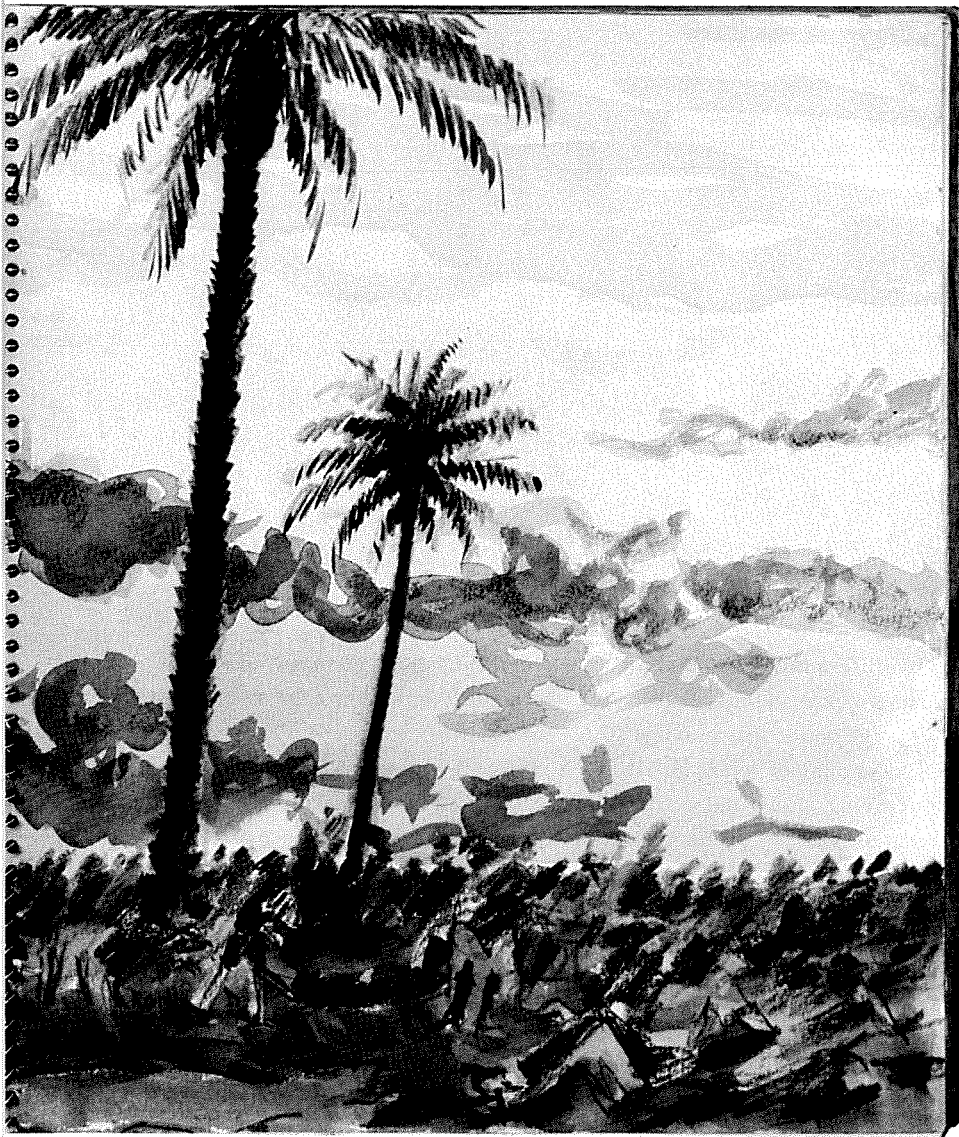
Unlike most small towns, Haleiwa is not homogeneous. Several special events, like the Honolulu symphony concert at Alii Beach Park, consecrate the diverse peoples — military, surfers, mill workers, *haoles*, Asians, Hawaiians, even the man who wore black cowboy boots to the eclipse — as one if only for an evening. Nate and I sketched the same scene. The clouded yellow sunset silhouetted the thousands of concertgoers, sprawled on the lawn, standing, or playing. Moments later dusk blanketed the audience in darkness and silence. The symphony played to an iridescent sky. Haleiwa's landscape frequently activates multiple senses beyond the visual: the smell of plumaria intermixed with the taste of an apple banana, the sound of Hawaiian song juxtaposed against the touch of weightless warmth on a summer night. Nate and I realized that almost every sketch we had done had complex sensory associations.

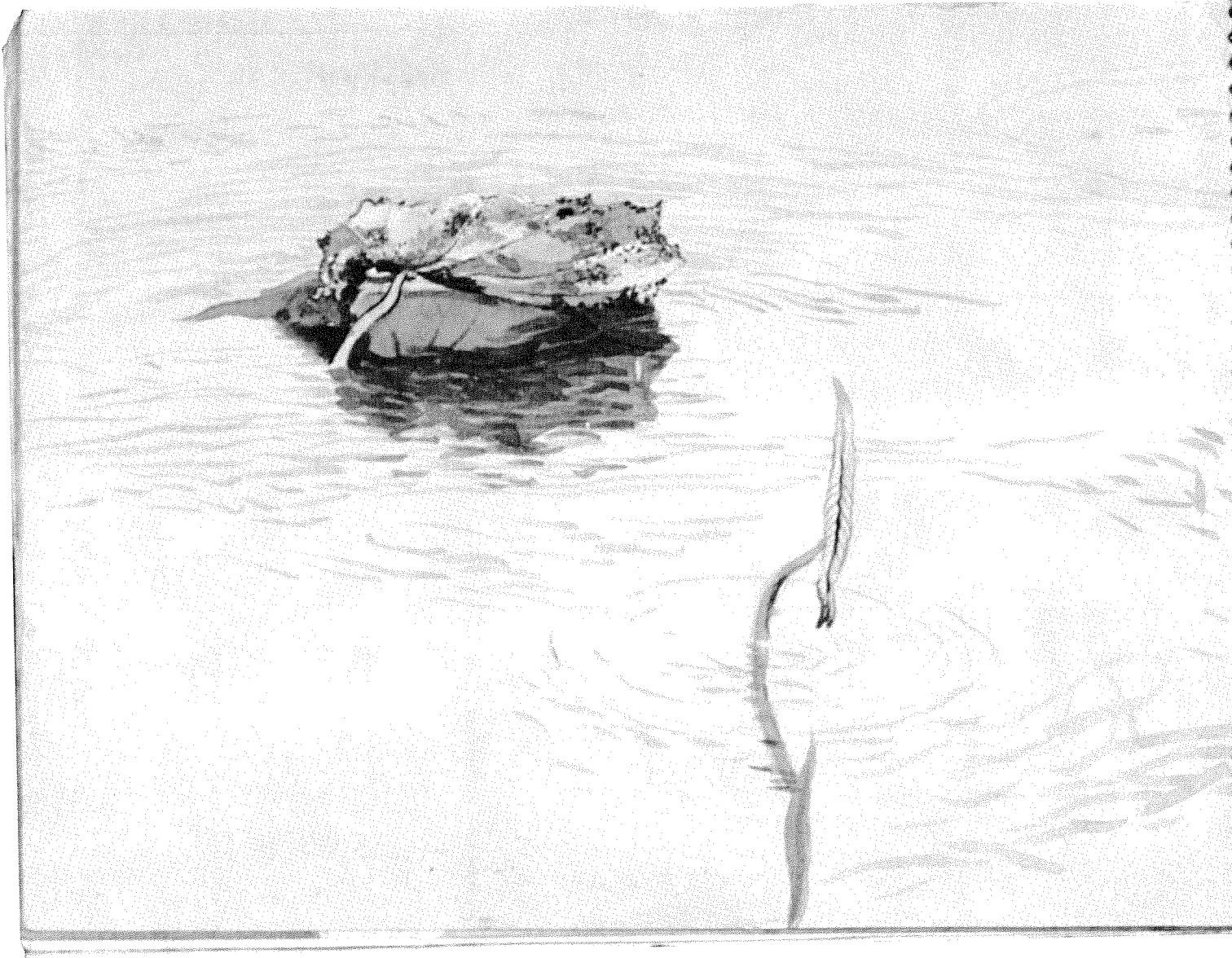
To come to be called Auntie or Uncle by people in Haleiwa is the highest honor. No one remembers how long Ima Kamalani has been called Uncle Ima or precisely why. Among other things he takes care of people; he stewards the land; he is a farmer who knows water, soil and weather intimately by name and hand. He demonstrates by his practice that the frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives. He has a royal wisdom seasoned by the pain and joy of life, of choices made. He sees and understands things that the rest of us don't. *Kumu*





Two interpretations of the sunset concert at Alii Beach.





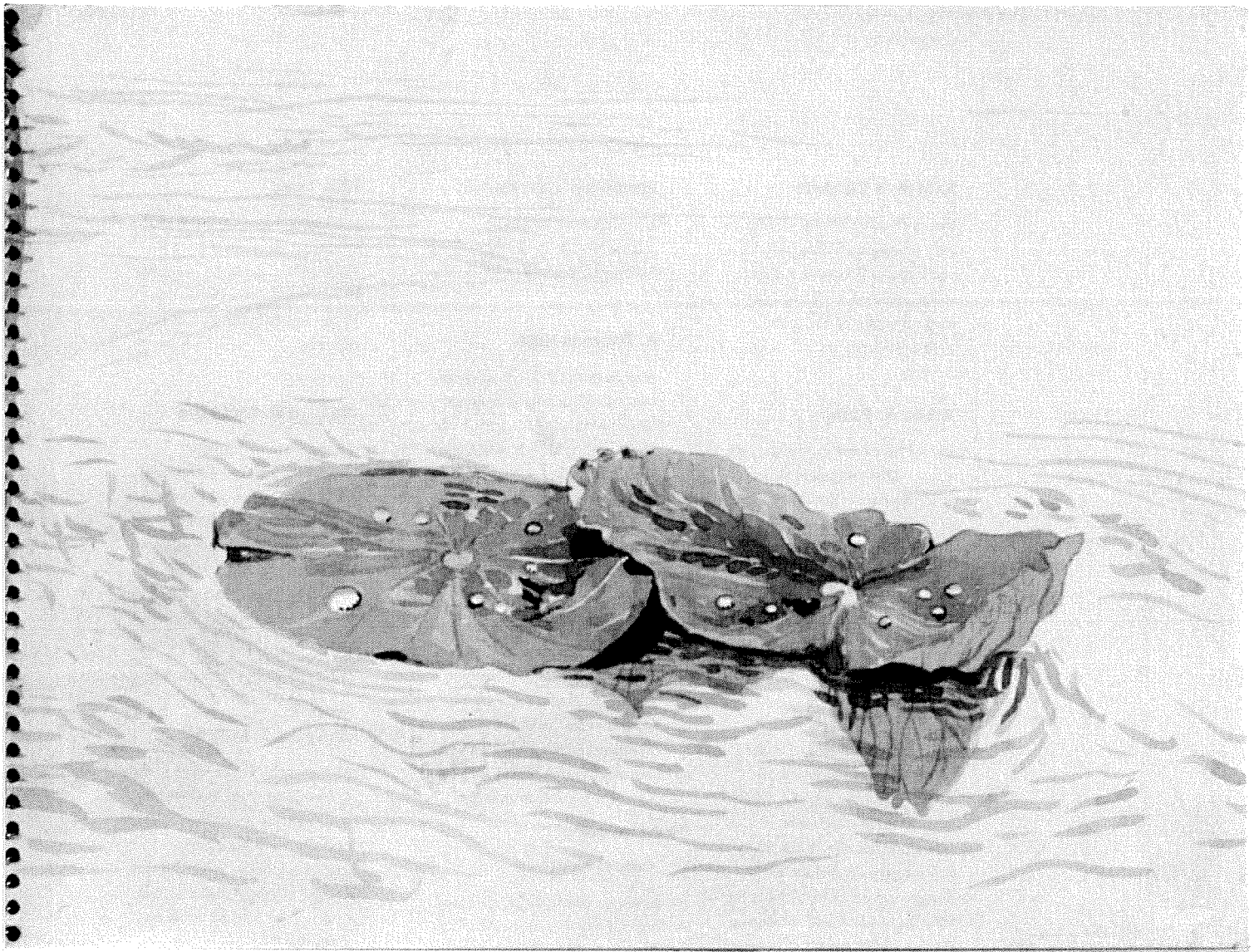
(teacher), *kabuna, alii* — he is all of these and none of these. You can never figure out if Uncle Ima is a man ahead of his time, of his time, behind the times, or timeless.

His landscape is as enigmatic as Ima himself, a secret natural garden with magic powers. This is the wetland, a productive yet fragile waterland fed by underground springs, some say the sacred Kawaiupuolo spring with the purest water that never ceases. This wetland is less than one hundred feet behind the main street but it is hidden, unobserved by visitor and native alike.

To reach Ima's landscape one takes the back road, turns left on the road the name of which no *haole* can pronounce, right on the road with

no name, then ask Annie if Ima is at home. He may appear and invite you to sit on the edge on the marsh in one of the numerous outdoor rooms he has created for farming, sitting and watching the wetland. Naturally teeming with birds, red swordtails and prawns, the wetland is superficially paced like a video game. Underneath is an atmosphere of slowness, continuity and repetition. Both the teeming and the slowness create a trancelike effect. Ima grows *basu* here. Ima and his landscape nourish the mind and soul of the receptive visitor.

Sitting under a tent surrounded by coconut palms at the edge on the marsh, Ima demonstrates the correct way to grate coconut and weave *lau bala*. Then he tells a story about materialism and greed. Ima once had cows but they kept getting into the cane fields. They were hard to catch. Ima kept getting called into court to pay fines for the damage the cows did. The more cows he had the more profits but also more fines and worry. So one day when someone offered to buy the cows, Ima traded them for two cases of beer. The buyer and seller shared the beer. After the beer was gone, Ima nodded towards the cows and said to the buyer, "Now you catch them." There is a long silence.



Ima does not drive. He did once. He had a car. He would park it. The kids would steal it, drive it on the back roads until it ran out of gas. They would come to him and say, "Uncle Ima, car won't go." He would fetch the car. Once the kid thieves brought only the steering wheel. He walked out, repaired the car, brought it back to Haleiwa, and gave it to the thief. There are many lessons of patience. Ima reminds us that the lessons cannot all be learned in a day.

There are lessons in what the *hasu* gives. A lotus blossom is a special gift. There are lessons in how the *hasu* grows. One leaf curls and dies. A fish hides under it. Its root is ready to



harvest. A new sprout breaks the surface seeking sun. Balls of spring water play a game on the leaf two feet in diameter. A drawing meditation for a day teaches all these things. But this place and its culture is hidden from view. Its lessons are hidden from would-be seekers. Ima says with sadness referring to the location, the knowledge, the sense of place so undervalued, "The peoples don't see what's behind." ●

Above: One lesson from Uncle Ima's *hasu*.

Left: Uncle Ima with a lotus blossom gift for the *haole* girl.