O‘AHU EARNS ITS PLACE AS AN EMERGING ART HUB
Local and international artists help to elevate Hawai‘i’s presence on the art stage

HONOLULU—O‘ahu is widely known for its surf, natural beauty and iconic locations, but what may surprise visitors that don’t frequent here often is Honolulu’s robust art scene. In 2017, O‘ahu further elevated its presence on the art stage by hosting 33 artists from over a dozen countries for the inaugural Honolulu Biennial, the first of its kind in the U.S. The event attracted nearly 100,000 visitors to nine exhibition sites across the island, including O‘ahu’s many museums and galleries.

Local artists were joined by others in the Pacific region including peers from Tonga, Tahiti, the Marshall Islands, as well as major names from East Asia including Japan’s Yayoi Kusama and Taiwan-born Lee Mingwei (who now lives in New York and Paris).

Other young local and international artists are making O‘ahu an increasingly relevant hub including the artist collective Lana Lane Studios which puts on the annual POW! WOW! Hawai‘i event. POW! WOW! Hawai‘i started in 2011 and brings together contemporary artists from all over the world who cover warehouses with murals in Honolulu’s former industrial area Kaka‘ako, which is now a thriving arts and mixed-use district.

Nearby neighbors in O‘ahu’s historic Chinatown are the Chinatown Artist Lofts, which have been in operation since 2000 and affiliated gallery and performance space Arts at Mark’s Garage. Every First Friday of each month, this establishment, along with other Chinatown and Downtown shops and galleries open their doors for Honolulu’s largest monthly self-guided arts tour.

Heading towards Diamond Head is the Honolulu Museum of Art, the largest private presenter of visual arts programs in the state, with an internationally renowned collection of more than 50,000 works. Guests can take a browse through the various galleries, catch an independent film in the Doris Duke Theatre or check out ARTafterDARK – the museum’s monthly art party held on the
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Add 2

last Friday of each month. The museum’s second location Spalding House is the former Alice Cooke Spalding residence, in the midst of the beautiful residential community of Makiki Heights. The museum has seven galleries with rotating works of art by celebrated international and local contemporary artists.

The Honolulu Museum of Art is also the origination point for a tour of Doris Duke’s Shangri La. Shangri La was the estate of American heiress and philanthropist, Doris Duke. Today, the historic property serves as a museum to educate visitors and showcase the exquisite Islamic art collected by the heiress throughout her travels in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. Shangri La also hosts invited artists for an Artists in Residence program for those whose work is related to advancing the study and understanding of Islamic arts and culture.

The principal museum of the Pacific is Bishop Museum. The museum has roots stretching back to Bernice Pauahi Bishop, a royal descendant of King Kamehameha I, and a visit to the museum adds rich context to the traveler’s time on O‘ahu. Hawaiian Hall holds some of the most treasured Hawaiian cultural objects in the world. The museum’s earth science exhibits and state-of-the-art planetarium allow visitors to learn about O‘ahu’s unique natural environments. In addition to its massive collections, the museum hosts worldwide travelling exhibits along with exclusive exhibits created by Bishop Museum’s own eminent scientific and cultural researchers.

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