

Maui fire resonates in art selected for annual show

By Steven Mark
smark@staradvertiser.com

V. Lee Cabanilla, an acclaimed woodworker on Lanai, refers to his latest creation as “she” and “her.” That’s because the work is a sculpture of the Hawaii goddess Laka. He sees the piece as a mystical reaffirmation that life and community will be reborn on fire-ravaged Maui, where he has close family ties.

“Everyone thinks about Laka as the goddess of hula, but she’s also the goddess of the forest, and vegetation, and life, and things growing,” he said. “I just kept making her and making her, and I kind of saw that spirit of resiliency that people have in Hawaii.”

Cabanilla’s sculpture, titled “Laka and the Fire,” is the centerpiece for the Hawai’i Craftsmen Annual Statewide Exhibition 2023, which opened this weekend at the Downtown Art Center. It’s one of many woodworking, textile, sculpture, ceramic and other crafted items that portray the artists’ response to the Maui wildfire, said Chris Edwards, co-chair of the exhibit.

“One of the things that was on everyone’s consciousness was the wildfires on Maui,” Edwards said. “Some people made things that were directly in response to the wildfires, and some people reinterpreted works that they had made previously in light of the wildfire. Some of these pieces take months or years to make, so turning something around that quickly was probably hard, but you could tell ... that it was weighing heavily on them.”

Cabanilla’s piece almost didn’t make it to the show. He started carving a piece of salvaged koa about a week before the fire, not knowing what it would become. He finished it after the fire, but even after he finished it, he wondered whether it would be in poor taste to show it. He already had two other pieces lined up for the show.

“But every single person who walked into the shop said, ‘You’re crazy if you don’t let people see this,’ and so I did,” Cabanilla said.

Cabanilla has won awards at the exhibition in years past, but “Laka” is special. He had rescued the wood from a tree that was felled because it threatened a house. “If you look at Laka, you can see her face and the grain and the different grain structure and how the wood grew,” he said.

Another item in the exhibit that references the Maui fires is a vase by Brooke Auchincloss. As a ceramist specializing in raku and historic Chinese and Japanese techniques, she works with “intense fire” — sometimes over 1,800 degrees. She has her own raku kiln and fire pit in her Upcountry Maui property.

“The thing I love about doing raku and the alternative firing I do is that the fire is as much the artist as you are,” said Auchincloss, who was a renowned photographer before turning to ceramics about a year before the pandemic.

For this exhibit, she had created a vase and glazed a branch on it. Unfired, the branch is black. Firing it would have turned the branch white and would have created “smoke effects” in brown and gray on the rest of the vase, she said.

Auchincloss was planning to fire the vase at about the time the wildfires struck Maui, but after they hit, “I couldn’t,” she said. “Not only would it freak out my neighbors, I just didn’t have the heart to make fire.”

Without firing, the vase, titled “Unfired,” remains white, reminiscent of a sandy beach, with the branch evoking a single charred tree left behind by fire.

“Being an artist on Maui at this time, I honestly could not have submitted a piece that didn’t reference that cataclysmic event,” Auchincloss said. “It affected all of our lives.”

With 106 juried items representing 99 artists, selected out of more than 500 entries, this year’s Craftsmen exhibit shows the growth of craftsmanship statewide, Edwards said. “Last year was the first time that the number of neighbor island artists exceeded the number of Oahu artists,” he said, adding that the trend toward more neighbor island submissions started about three years ago.

He said Molokai in particular had recently shown strong growth in craftsmanship. “It used to be there weren’t enough artists from Molokai to justify the cost of sending the juror there,” he said. “But three years ago, there was such an outpouring of submissions from that island that we’re like, ‘We’re sending the juror there.’ And that has further ignited interest on that island.”

Beth McLaughlin, artistic director and chief curator at Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, Mass., juried the show and left



V. Lee Cabanilla’s sculpture “Laka and the Fire” is carved out of salvaged koa.



PHOTOS COURTESY HAWAII CRAFTSMEN

Maui artist Brooke Auchincloss’ vase, “Unfired,” features a black branch evoking a single charred tree left behind by fire.

with the impression that Hawaii “has very much its own craft community, informed by a lot of the traditions of Hawaii, of the natural materials found on the island. I thought that was really exciting.”

She also found it interesting that the craft work here also had connections to the larger craft community and the world at

HAWAII CRAFTSMEN ANNUAL STATEWIDE EXHIBITION 2023

>> When: Through Oct. 28; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesdays to Sundays
>> Where: Downtown Art Center, 1041 Nuuanu Ave.
>> Info: hawaiicraftsmen.org or 808-521-3282

large, referring to pieces about social justice issues, political issues like the Jan. 6 insurrection in Washington, D.C., and broader cultural themes.

McLaughlin traveled to five islands to view almost all submissions in person. She was given a book previewing all the pieces, which made the process quicker, but her experience also suggests why it is important to come see the exhibit for yourself.

“There’s really no replacement for being able to see the objects in person,” she said. “I really applaud the organization for spending the resources to bring the juror to the five islands, to meet the artists, to view their artwork, and to share space with the objects. I think ultimately that makes the final exhibition that much stronger.”

K-DRAMA



JEFF CHUNG

Deep feelings are confessed on ‘Root’

THIS WEEK’S SYNOPSIS

“Root of the Throne”

EPISODE 13
6:40 p.m. today

Boon-yi gets the news of Bang-won’s release and runs over to see him and tend to his wounds. Bang-won learns Boon-yi is the girl from his childhood and confesses his feelings for her. Yi Seong-gye breaks his alliance with Hong In-bang.

EPISODE 14
7:50 p.m. today

Hong In-bang sends Cho Young as a matchmaker to Min Je’s family. Bang-won meets with Min Da-kyung to stop Hong In-bang’s plan. Ttang-sae finds out his sister Boon-yi is alive. He asks Jung Do-jeon to leave Yeon-hee and Boon-yi out of his plan.

“Numbers”

EPISODE 9
7:45 p.m. Monday

Ho Woo and Seung Jo are enraged to discover that Je Kyun was manipulating Hyung Woo. As they trace Je Kyun’s scheme, they are shocked over Je Kyun’s ultimate goal. Ho Woo is thrown into yet another crisis and receives a parcel.

EPISODE 10
7:45 p.m. Tuesday

Ho Woo is furious that Je Kyun has had such influence in his life. Yeon A is faced with a huge crisis because of Je Kyun, and it brings Seung Jo and Ho Woo back together. Ho Woo finds a link between Sang Ah’s foundation and VP Han’s client.

“Good Supper”

EPISODES 89-90
7:50 p.m. Wednesday

Yong-gu meets Pil-sun’s family. He pledges to love her forever. Kyung-chul moves into Young-shin’s room at Kyung-su’s home. Young-shin tells Kyung-su her feelings for him won’t change. Young-shin confronts Sook-jung and asks why she killed her mother in front of Jong-kwon’s family.

EPISODE 91-92
7:50 p.m. Thursday

Sook-jung accuses Young-shin of lying and leeching off Kyung-su all her life. Jong-kwon asks Young-shin if she truly didn’t know his identity. Sook-jung is asked to bring her brother. She bribes him with money and a watch to