

## AIDS in spotlight

Three researchers with Hawaii ties will defend this week their work on the first vaccine to show promise in fighting AIDS >> Pg. 6



## Kelly revealed

A new exhibit of work by beloved Hawaii artist John Kelly at the Pegge Hopper Gallery promises a deeper look at his talent >> Pg. 30



# A RECORD OF change & loss

A fresh look at artist John Kelly's idyllic depictions of Hawaii life is presented in a show that includes previously unseen work

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John Kelly

Art enthusiasts familiar with John Kelly's work will be quick to describe his idyllic depictions of a Hawaii as populated by lei makers and fishermen, kupuna and keiki in the 1930s. But that would just be scratching the surface of his body of work.

Viewers will be able to see Kelly's work through fresh eyes when Kelly Art Hawai'i presents its first major exhibit from the Estate Collection of John Melville Kelly. The show opens with a 5 p.m. reception tomorrow at the Pegge Hopper Gallery.

The exhibition, which will continue through Nov. 14, premieres many of the printmaker's etchings that have never before been exhibited, and there will be more than a dozen images offered for sale, with a portion of proceeds benefiting the Honolulu Symphony.

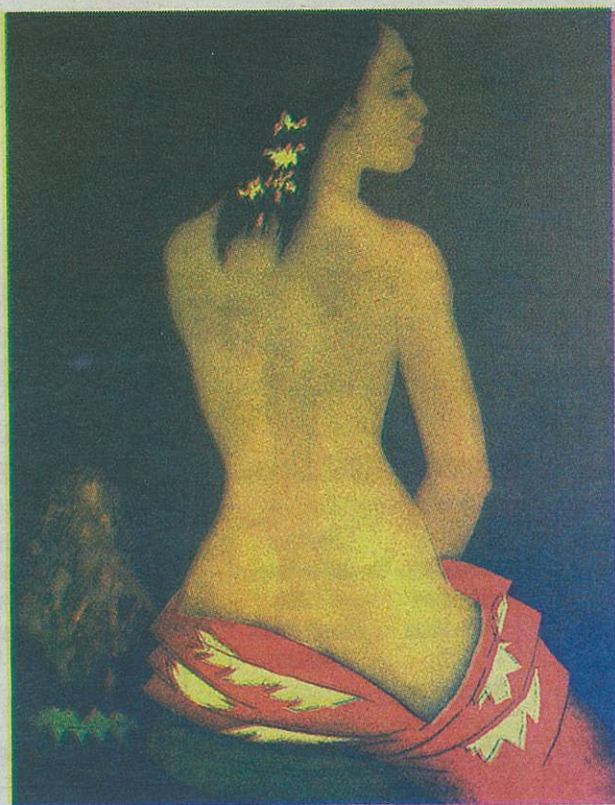
"There'll be good examples of what he did that isn't familiar to everybody," said Kelly's granddaughter Colleen Kelly. "Just why they haven't been shown, I don't know."

Kelly Art Hawai'i was created by the family to manage the Estate Collection, and the exhibit marks the first time the family has attempted to show his work without an outside curator's assistance.

Where a museum-curated show might focus primarily on artistic themes or methods, the artist's family chose instead to present a varied range of the artist's work from the 1930s up until his death in 1962,



At left is one of John Melville Kelly's familiar works, "I'a" or Fisherman's Daughter. At right is "Throw Net Fisherman," a world premiere, as is "Nude Study," below.



resulting in a narrative of the times in which he lived, which Colleen now sees as a record of social change and loss.

Having grown up surrounded by her grandfather's prints, Colleen said she could not help but notice how his Hawaiian figures changed over time. The changes were not merely stylistic, but in the mien of the people themselves.

In his early depictions, she said, Hawaiians were in their element, in the water, close to shore net-fishing, so engrossed in their pursuits that they appeared not to

notice the artist at work.

"Their skin was wrinkled, their hair was kapakahi, flying all around," she said.

In the 1950s, she said she started seeing more images of women in muumuu, smiling as if posing for a camera with faces "smooth, real pretty, real clear, their eyebrows perfect," Colleen said. "You had to ask, 'What happened to the culture?' You can clearly see Western culture took over and he documented the change all the way through."

OVER TIME, she said she realized that her grandfa-

ther had been documenting social change in Hawaii through his art as surely as any print historian, owed in part to his journalistic background. He had worked for the San Francisco Examiner and, later, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin as its art director.

"When my grandparents first moved to Blackpoint, Waikiki was being built, and in the process, Hawaiian people were evicted from the land. People became homeless and made their own ways of living around the base of Diamond Head. Blackpoint was country then and became home to the Hawaiian people. Consequently, my grandparents were surrounded by Hawaiian people, their lifestyle, and that's how they entered my grandfather's art," Colleen said.

"People associate him with painting young women, but there were not just young women; there were old people, little kids. It was a nice capsule of their culture and what the life was in those days, before we had cultural change. I'd like to think he was preserving history."

There were strong indications that he was doing just that, spurred on by his wife Kate, a sculptor who hailed from a family of Bay Area activists. Kate's mother and grandmother both worked for women's right to vote.

"They were sensitive people who believed in civil rights and I'm sure they would have been aware of seeing the Hawaiians'

#### ON EXHIBIT

*"Impressions of an Era: The Art of John Kelly"*

- >> **Place:** The Pegge Hopper Gallery, 1164 Nuuanu Ave.
- >> **On view:** Open with a 5 p.m. reception tomorrow, continuing 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays to Fridays and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays through Nov. 14
- >> **Admission:** Free
- >> **Call:** 524-1160

lifestyle collapse and known it was not a nice thing. They were trying to connect with it and reflect it in their art."

Colleen hopes the show will also help bring more attention to her grandmother, who was a lifelong influence in her husband's work, having initially introduced him to printmaking and encouraging him to pursue his art.

Colleen continues to be amazed at seeing grass shacks in her grandfather's work.

"You look at the images and think, wow, this feels like it's 200 years old, but they are fairly recent and shows you how much we have lost in a brief time, from just before we were a state. I'm both in awe of the art and sad about what was lost."

*An advance copy of the Honolulu Academy of Art's new book, "John Melville Kelly: Hawaiian Idyll," will be available for review at the exhibit. Written by Natasha Roessler and designed by Barbara Pope, the book catalogs the academy's 2005 exhibit of Kelly's work.*