

## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### Jean Charlot and Classical Hawaiian Culture

Jean Charlot (8 February 1898–23 March 1979) was a prolific artist and writer of creative, academic and popular works. His career can be divided into four periods. In France (1898–1921) he received his earliest, multicultural influences and art education, served in World War I, and exhibited liturgical and secular art. In Mexico (1921–28), he was a pioneer of the Mexican Mural Renaissance, completing the first monumental fresco, and writing extensively on Mexican art. In the continental US (1928–49), he continued to create paintings, prints and murals; he illustrated books, taught, was consulted by museums, and published art history and criticism. Charlot came to Hawai'i in 1949 for a mural commission and stayed until his death. He became immersed in Hawaiian culture, which inspired new directions in his work. His activity in Hawai'i and Fiji forms the fourth period of a multicultural career.

I focus on Charlot's work in classical native Hawaiian culture, but he continued to be productive in other areas as well. Besides the post-contact, multicultural Hawaiian culture, he treated Mexican, Western, Asian, religious and historical subjects, and developed a new area of his visual art on encountering the cognate Pacific culture of Fiji.<sup>1</sup> His work on Hawaiian culture is itself so diverse that I will be able to provide only a summary here.

CHARLOT'S INTEREST IN Hawaiian culture was unusual at the time and can be explained from his background. Of French, Spanish, Russian, Jewish and Aztec extraction, Charlot was reared in a multilingual and multicultural household. His French maternal ancestors, the Goupils, had migrated to Mexico in the 1820s and married into Spanish, Aztec and Jewish families. The family was extremely proud of its Aztec blood, and several members became prominent *Américanistes*, French scholars of native American cultures. Charlot's ancestors had served as archeological consultants for the Emperor Maximilian and the pioneering archeologist Désiré Charnay. Charlot's grand-uncle Eugène Espidon Goupil (1831–96) donated the Boturini–Aubin–Goupil Collection — the most important single archive of Aztec codices — to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in 1898. The young Charlot was surrounded by a treasury of Aztec art, which he studied assiduously.

The motivation of the *Américanistes* was to combat the Western prejudices against Native Americans as cruel barbarians and to publicise their great cultural achievements. For the Goupils and the Charlots, this was a family concern. Eugène Goupil wrote that his donation was 'un pieux hommage à la mémoire de ma mère', 'a pious homage to the memory of my mother', who was half Aztec.<sup>2</sup> Charlot would devote much of his life to revealing the native side of history and to promoting the understanding and appreciation of native cultures.

<sup>1</sup> Caroline Klarr, 'Painting paradise for a post-colonial Pacific: the Fijian frescoes of Jean Charlot', PhD thesis, The Florida State University School of Visual Arts and Dance (Tallahassee 2005). Charlot visited Samoa and the Society Islands but did not develop subjects for his visual arts there. All unpublished materials cited are in the Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu (hereinafter JCC), (<http://libweb.hawaii.edu/libdept/charlotcoll/about-coll.html>). This site also includes published writings by and about Jean Charlot, reproductions of his art work, and repositories of The Jean Charlot Foundation (also accessible via the John Charlot Foundation website (<http://www.hawaii.edu/jcf/>)).

<sup>2</sup> Eugène Goupil, quoted in John Charlot, 'Jean Charlot as Paul Claudel's Ixtlilxóchitl', *The Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 17 & 18 (1990–91), 68.

Charlot early established a method in fulfilling this mission.<sup>3</sup> He would combine scholarship with his artistic sensibility to form his own original view of a culture, which he would then express in the visual arts and in academic and creative writing. When he moved to Mexico in 1921, he began to widen his earlier study of Mexican culture. He met with scholars and connoisseurs and studied Náhuatl with Luz Jiménez, a young artist's model from Milpa Alta, where an unusually classical form of the language was spoken. Luz invited Charlot to stay with her family in their village and accompany them on the ancient pilgrimage to Chalma. These experiences inspired a number of Mexican subjects in Charlot's art.

Charlot also studied Indian art, both in his Mexican family's collections and in museums and archeological sites. From 1926 to 1928, he was a member of the Carnegie Institution excavation of the Temple of the Warriors at Chich'en Itza, Yucatán. Starting as a draughtsman and finishing as one of the three co-authors of the final report, his contribution as an artist and scholar was praised for 'bringing to life' Maya religious concepts and their 'qualities of mysticism and striking beauty'.<sup>4</sup>

Charlot expressed his view of Mexican Indian art in numerous scholarly and popular articles and also in two Náhuatl plays produced in Indian villages in 1948.<sup>5</sup> In visual genres, he created an influential style that was based on indigenous art and that enabled him to express that 'Mexico est une terre essentiellement plastique, tragique et surnaturelle', 'Mexico is a land essentially artistic, tragic, and supernatural'.<sup>6</sup> He expanded this point in a later interview, contrasting the colours of Mexico to those of Hawai'i:

I've seen Mexico as a dark land. I've seen Mexico as, you could say, the color of Indian skin. And there is also there a, well, a certain barbaric quality which I'm not at all against. In a plastic way, that gives strength to things, but that strength is accompanied by darkness. So that my Mexican things are always so full, so fuller of color and darker in value, and when a pure white appears, like in those *malinches*, for example, it appears as a contrast to the average value of the picture. And it is true that in the Hawaiian pictures, when — I mean a representation of Hawai'i — white is the major thing. And it goes into modulations of colors rather than contrast.<sup>7</sup>

Charlot developed a number of themes and subjects that depicted the daily life of the Mexican Indians, the richness of their visual, literary and dramatic culture, and their tragic and continuing history of conflict with the West. In his 'Massacre in the Main Temple' of 1922–23 (Figure 1) — the first completed fresco of the Mexican Mural Renaissance and the first to portray the Conquest as an atrocity — the Indians, dressed festively in their ritual dance, are attacked by Spaniards fully covered in steel armour-like machines. The Indians represent the artistic approach to life and the Spaniards the lust for gold: 'ce conflit plus général qui existe entre la recherche du Beau et du bien d'un côté, et celle de l'argent et du jour de l'autre', 'a conflict of more general character: between the

<sup>3</sup> John Charlot, 'Jean Charlot and local cultures', in Ethel Moore (ed.), *Jean Charlot: paintings, drawings, and prints*, Georgia Museum of Art Bulletin, 2:2 (1976), 26–35.

<sup>4</sup> Eric S. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: an introduction* (Norman 1960), 61. Linda Schele, a leader in the later successful effort to decipher Maya hieroglyphs, wrote that her interpretation of the architectural and artistic program of the Temple of the Warriors complex drew 'heavily upon the skill and brilliance of Jean Charlot, an artist and iconographer'. Linda Schele and David Freidel, *A Forest of Kings: the untold story of the ancient Maya* (New York 1990), 502.

<sup>5</sup> A listing of Jean Charlot's published and unpublished writings is being prepared for posting on the JCC website. See fn. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Charlot, 'Guadalupe Posadas', 1925, available online Jean Charlot, *Textes Français: Œuvres en prose*, ed. John Charlot, Marie-José Fassio and Michelle Smith ([http://www.hawaii.edu/jcf/French\\_articles/](http://www.hawaii.edu/jcf/French_articles/), accessed 24 Jan. 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Idem, taped interview, 2 Apr. 1978, JCC.

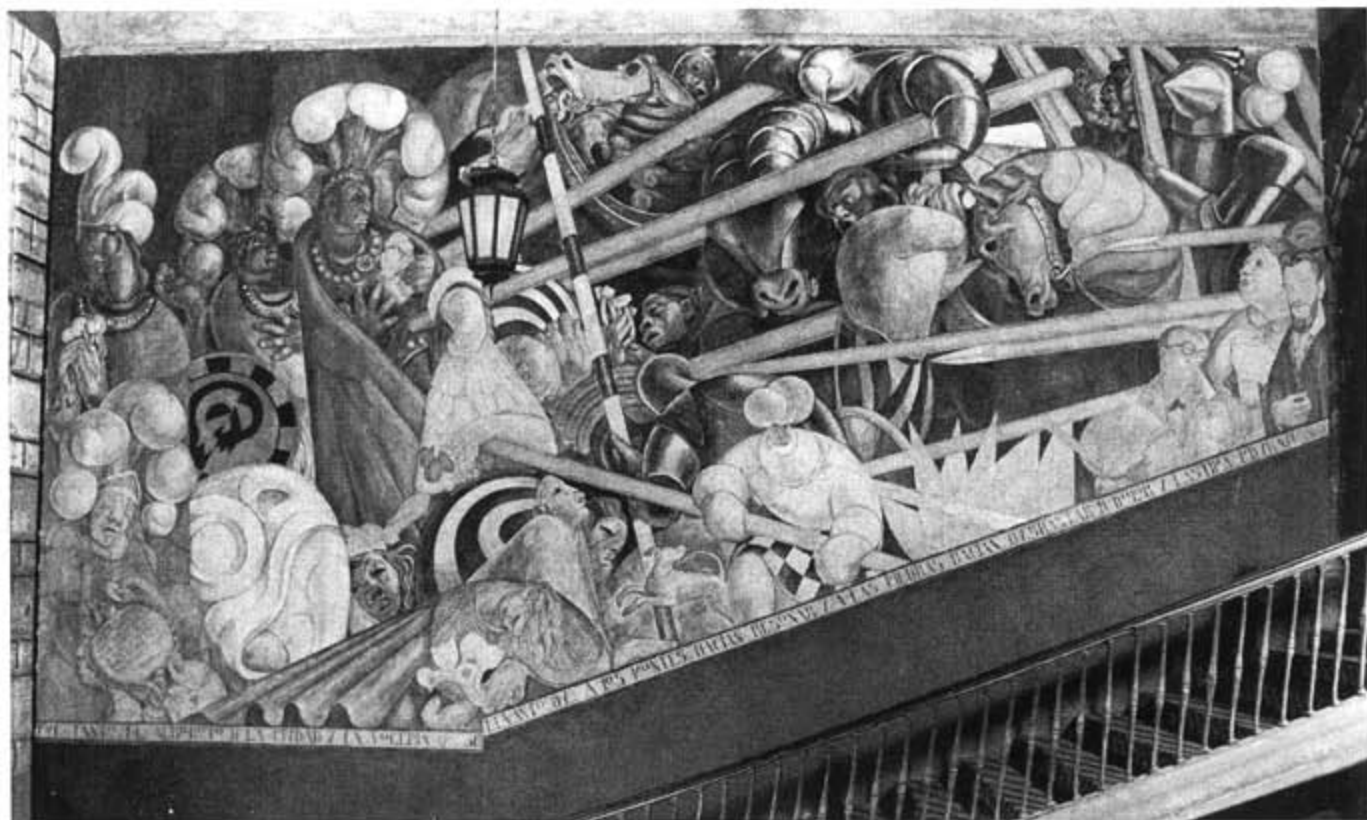


FIGURE 1: Jean Charlot, 'The Massacre in the Main Temple', fresco, 14' x 26', 1922-23. Stairway, west court, Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, now the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico D.F. Photograph: Centro Nacional de Conservación de Obras Artísticas.

search for the *Beautiful and the Good* and that for *Money and Pleasure*.<sup>8</sup> Charlot, the *Américaniste*, reveals the Indian side of history and calls for a greater appreciation of the Indian approach to life.<sup>9</sup>

CHARLOT'S MEXICAN EXPERIENCE formed the basis of his approach to Hawai'i. When he arrived in Honolulu on 13 June 1949, to paint a mural in the Administration Building (now Bachman Hall) of the University of Hawai'i, he characteristically chose native Hawaiian culture as his subject. That this choice surprised many residents reveals how differently that culture was viewed at the time from the way it is today. Many aspects of Hawaiian culture were in fact being practised by Hawaiians, and a small group of scholars — such as Mary Kawena Pukui, Samuel H. Elbert and Kenneth Emory — were devoting themselves to its study. Charlot would associate himself with this group. But the consensus of the general public was that Hawaiian culture was a thing of the past, interesting only to archeologists, historians, and romantics. Most artists restricted themselves to picturesque visions of Paradise with lissome Polynesian temptresses. The main exceptions were Madge Tennent, whose monumental Hawaiian women Charlot much admired, and Juliette May Fraser, a *kama'āina* 'life-long resident' who breathed a practical reality into her depictions of ancient Hawai'i. Nonetheless, most public presentations of Hawaiian culture tended to be cute or trivial. Charlot stated:

[T]here was a jolliness that was seen in the Hawaiian scene that was taken for granted, with the exception again of Madge [Tennent], that was even repulsive for me. Most of the things that I saw on Hawaiian subjects were jolly.<sup>10</sup>

Visiting the Kamehameha Schools for Hawaiian children, Charlot was shocked to find that instruction in Hawaiian culture consisted of teaching old games and sports as childish play: 'I found it, if I may say, incredibly stupid to give to those children a *debased* idea of their past, a *debased* idea of their culture.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in that period at the school, the hula master Winona Beamer had to lock the door of her office so that she could teach secretly the forbidden classical hula to selected, discreet students.

Hawaiian culture was not presented as heroic and monumental like the Indian cultures Charlot had depicted in Mexico. Rather, American culture was privileged and Americanisation was promoted. This attitude could be found even among Hawaiians of authority, for instance, at the Kamehameha Schools:

the thing that I would say opened my eyes, perhaps I wouldn't have realized it, was that nice lady who was teaching Hawaiian language and every five minutes would say, 'But for translation only, but for translation only.' And I found out that people didn't look with a kind eye to children who spoke Hawaiian. There were still quite a number of them. And I don't mean pidgin, I mean Hawaiian. When you think that the whole thing was done *for* Hawaiians, I found [inaudible] the thing despicable. Not despicable that the people were despicable. They were nice people, but I found it incredible, if you want. There was a slight bit of a fury that seized me that probably came into my things.<sup>12</sup>

Because of his experience in Mexico, Charlot suspected there was a Hawaiian side to the story and set out to find it by the same means he had developed to make contact with

<sup>8</sup> Idem, 'Réponse à Molina', 1923, available online Jean Charlot, *Textes Français* ([http://www.hawaii.edu/jcf/French\\_articles/](http://www.hawaii.edu/jcf/French_articles/), accessed 24 Jan. 2006).

<sup>9</sup> John Charlot, 'Jean Charlot's first fresco: The Massacre in the Main Temple', 2001 ([http://libweb.hawaii.edu/libdept/charlotcoll/J\\_Charlot/johncharlot.html](http://libweb.hawaii.edu/libdept/charlotcoll/J_Charlot/johncharlot.html), accessed 24 Jan. 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Jean Charlot, taped interview, 7 Apr. 1978, JCC.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Aztecs and Mayas. Charlot's reliance on personal contact and oral communication was partly motivated by the comparative lack of published materials. Although books by David Malo, Kepelino, Martha Beckwith and Katharine Luomala were available — as well as articles by others — basic works would be published only in the future. 'The Polynesian Family System in Ka'u, Hawai'i' by E.S.C. Handy and Pukui appeared in sections in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* between 1950 and 1955.<sup>13</sup> *Arts and Crafts of Hawaii* by Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter H. Buck) and the first instalment of the Hawaiian-English dictionaries compiled by Mary K. Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert were published in 1957.<sup>14</sup> Translations of the Hawaiian historians John Papa 'I'i and Samuel M. Kamakau were first published in 1959 and 1961 respectively.<sup>15</sup> Scholars in the field were focusing on basic ethnography and sources rather than theoretical discussions.

Charlot met Pukui and the Māori Te Rangi Hiroa at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, the main repository of Hawaiian cultural remains. The *kama'āina* artist Juanita Vitousek introduced him to a number of Hawaiians, whom he used as models. The most important introduction was to Aunt Jennie Wilson, the great hula dancer, one of the few links to the sacred hula of the past. Charlot wrote in his diary for 4 August 1949: 'With Vitousek to see Mrs. Wilson, wife of mayor Honolulu, hula dancer to King Kalakaua. Talk, gestures, a great experience.'<sup>16</sup> Wilson told him of ghost dogs and hearing the music of the dead at night, a classic Hawaiian religious experience:

I did hear a noise of drums and chanting, not loud enough so that I could make out the words. There must have been many people as also there were the noises that a crowd makes, and over everything, singing, a woman's voice. The next day mother said it was the noises of a *heiau* [temple] that I had heard, that in that place had lived a woman much dedicated to religious forms, and the *heiau* once was built near where our house was now. It was her voice I had heard.<sup>17</sup>

Wilson was old and crippled with arthritis, but Charlot was overwhelmed by her religious power when she chanted and danced:

Who has not heard Aunt Jenny chanting the opening prayer to the goddess of the dance, Laka, has missed a religious experience... The dance followed. It was perforce a seated hula with an almost cubistic quality to its motions, wracked as were the dancer's joints with illness. Spellbound I forgot to sketch, and yet it is truly Aunt Jenny who 'posed' for the dozen or so dancers scene in the finished fresco.<sup>18</sup>

Charlot would continue to consult Hawaiians for his work. In a sketch for his first mural, he had an *ipu* 'gourd' instrument being played along with the drums. When Pukui told him this was not done, he suppressed it; Pukui was, he felt, an absolute authority on drumming. When the non-Hawaiian architect Vladimir Ossipoff told Charlot that Hawaiians would be offended by the front row of children in the mural, Charlot omitted several. Later he regretted doing so and felt he had taken Ossipoff's advice only

<sup>13</sup> E.S. Craighill Handy, 'The Hawaiian Family System' *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 59 (1950), 170-90; Idem and Mary Kawena Pukui, 'The Hawaiian Family System', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 60 (1951), 66-79; Idem, 'The Polynesian Family System in Ka'u, Hawaii', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 60 (1951) 187-222; 61 (1952), 243-82; 62 (1953), 123-68, 285-341; 64 (1955), 56-101.

<sup>14</sup> Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter Buck), *Arts and Crafts of Hawaii* (Honolulu 1957); Mary K. Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert, *Hawaiian-English Dictionary* (Honolulu 1957); idem, *English-Hawaiian Dictionary* (Hawaii 1964); idem, *Hawaiian-English Dictionary* (3rd edn, Hawaii 1965). The early editions of the dictionary were designed by Charlot.

<sup>15</sup> John Papa Ii, *Fragments of Hawaiian History*, tr. Mary K. Pukui, ed. Dorothy B. Barrère (Honolulu 1959); Samuel M. Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii* (Honolulu 1961).

<sup>16</sup> Jean Charlot, Diary, 4 Aug. 1949, JCC.

<sup>17</sup> Mrs Jennie Wilson, interview, '4-8-49 Told by Mrs Wilson', 4 Aug. 1949, unpublished ts., JCC.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Charlot, 'Introduction', *Two Hawaiian Plays: Hawaiian English* (Honolulu 1976), 7.



because of his own inexperience in the culture. Charlot was, however, always happy working with native Hawaiian speakers. He wrote of the production of his English-language play *Na'auao*: 'Aunt Jennie Kapahukulaokamamalu Wilson who was then 90 years old was kind enough to check the authenticity of the details and to act as a sponsor of the play'.<sup>19</sup> Similarly he wrote about the production of his Hawaiian-language *Laukiamanukahiki*:

Charlot remains grateful to his cast. The Hawaiian language was their's by birthright, and they showed infinite patience with the haole ['foreign'] author and director... At least ninety percent of the audience were Hawaiians who followed the action without need for the English commentary.<sup>20</sup>

Charlot began an intense study of Hawaiian art at the Bishop Museum, including fine art works, artefacts and archival photographs. Again, he was surprised by the presentation: masterpieces of sculpture were being used as props in tableaux.<sup>21</sup> Of post-contact Hawaiian art, he was most attracted to quilts, which Hawaiians had transformed from their missionary models into emblems of totemic power. Among the modern artists, Madge Tennent gave him a sense of the monumental, heroic quality of Hawaiians.

Charlot's study was an intense experience for him. He told me that, when he sat on the floor of one of the store rooms of the Bishop Museum and hit a drum with his hands, a great power surged up through his body, a moment caught in a photograph:

You have that photograph of myself for example beating a Hawaiian drum, and that one was a real old Hawaiian drum. And much of my visual result does not come from visual experience. I'm sure that the sounds I made on that drum were not brilliant and certainly not Hawaiian, but the motion, for example, of the arms, the rhythm, the trying to attune the ear to the, what I would call the monochrome, if you want, of a drum sound, were great experiences. And that thing comes out I suppose in the drummers that I have in the fresco.<sup>22</sup>

Charlot's experience was of a powerful culture that was still living in Hawaiians:

And at the time, Mrs. Pukui, to whom Juanita also presented me, gave me quite... my first ideas, I would say, on the Hawaiians living: the Hawaiians of ancient times, if you want, but the way they would live and so on, always around that idea of hers which is connected with music and specifically drumming. I was very interested in that. And I mentioned that photograph of myself drumming. And I still now, I mean thirty years later, work with the drummers. That last landscape, silkscreen, has a drummer which is, you could say, a direct descendant of my experience of drumming. And the drumming was suggested or guided if you want by Mrs. Pukui.<sup>23</sup>

Hawaiian art became a life-long study for Charlot, and he made a major contribution to its re-evaluation from artefacts of merely archaeological interest to world-class art. Just as with Mexican Indian creations, he argued that modern Western art movements made possible a more correct appreciation of those qualities that differed from Western

<sup>19</sup> Idem, press notice on playwriting, n.d. [early 1970s?], unpublished ts., JCC.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> I myself remember when I visited the Bishop Museum as a child that several masterpieces of Hawaiian sculpture were being used as props in tableaux with wax figures.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Morse, *Jean Charlot's Prints: a catalogue raisonné* (Honolulu 1976), 299; Jean Charlot, taped interview, 11 Apr. 1978, JCC.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, taped interview, 24 Apr. 1978, JCC.

Classicism.<sup>24</sup> Even more important, Hawaiian art could help in the creation of a style that would be truly of the place:

these shapes of men and dogs, of fans and paddles and birds, seen from the vantage point of our twentieth century, deliver a message of beauty exciting as an adventure in aesthetic, untainted by the clichés of the European, Greco-Roman tradition.<sup>25</sup>

Just as Aztec and Maya art influenced the Mexican Mural Renaissance, so Hawaiian featherwork and quilts could help modern artists with their colour sense, and Hawaiian sculpture and petroglyphs could help with their forms.

Charlot was clearly being drawn into Hawaiian culture, which had all the greatness and artistic emphasis of Mexican. He was finding the same basic contrast between those native cultures and Western. Whereas Mexican Indians dressed in feathers were killed by metal-clad Spaniards, Hawaiians and Cook's men engaged in an 'EXCHANGE OF FEATHER CLOAKS AND HELMETS FOR METAL TOOLS AND KEYS OF NAILS.' When he created his fresco 'Early Contacts of Hawaii with the Outer World', Charlot made this exchange the 'CENTRAL MOTIF: EARLIEST FORMS OF BARTER' (Figure 2).<sup>26</sup> Hawaiians give art: Westerners, technology. In Mexico, Charlot found conquest: in Hawai'i, commercial assimilation.

But Charlot was puzzled by the differences between the two native cultures themselves. As seen in his writing and his visual art over the following years, his view of those differences can be characterised in the following very general terms. Mexico seemed best expressed in dark colours, Hawai'i in bright. Charlot was initially put off by the light-blue Hawaiian skies with their cumulus clouds; they reminded him of bad Victorian art. Charlot's first print in Hawai'i, 'Hawaiian Drummer' of 1949, is a dramatic night scene.<sup>27</sup> He then solved the problem of daylight colours by raising them to the intensity of a red and yellow feather helmet depicted in the lithograph 'War Drum' of 1950.<sup>28</sup> Hawaiian art had given him the clue he needed. Indeed, he would find that the medium of fresco was especially suited to depicting the Hawaiian light.

Mexico focused on human beings, who carried the main message of an art work; Hawai'i focused on an all-encompassing nature. Over the years, Charlot would increasingly place human beings within their world and make the totality the bearer of the message. Mexican Indians believed in multiple worlds; Hawaiians felt gratefully at home in the world in which they lived. Religion drew Indians mystically into spiritual, immaterial realms; religion led Hawaiians deeper into their physical universe, the ultimate reality bounded by sky and earth. Charlot was amazed at how Hawaiians articulated their emotions and spirituality in physical terms. Because their world was beautiful, pleasure brought Hawaiians deeper into reality, whereas Indians explored their many realms through pain. Mexican Indian religion was nearer to Charlot's French Catholicism, with its crucifixion and self-mortification. Hawai'i presented a new challenge.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., 'Art show at the Planetarium', *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, 16 Nov. 1966, Sec. B, 1; 'Questions, answers', *ibid.*, 7 Jun. 1967, Sec. C, 1; 'Primitive Arts', *ibid.*, 14 Jun. 1967, Sec. D, 1, 6; 'Hawaiiana for Aloha Week', *ibid.*, 27 Sept. 1967, Sec. B, 1; 'The art of Polynesia', *ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1967, Sec. B, 1; Art Column, *ibid.*, 19 Aug. 1971, Sec. D, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Charlot, *An Artist on Art: collected essays of Jean Charlot*, Vol. 1, *Miscellany* (Honolulu 1972), 229-30.

<sup>26</sup> Idem, 'Subject matter', n.d. [1952?]; idem, Notes on 'Early Contacts of Hawaii with Occidental Culture' (Bishop Bank), unpublished ts., JCC (underlining and capitals in original). I emphasize that I concentrate in this article on Charlot's relationship with classical Hawaiian culture, but he worked in the mixed culture of post-contact Hawai'i as well, where, just as in Mexico, an original multi-racial culture was created.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Morse, *Jean Charlot's Prints*, no. 533.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 539.



FIGURE 2: Jean Charlot, 'Early Contacts of Hawaii with the Outer World', fresco, 11' x 67', 1951-52, detail of central section. Bishop Bank, Waikiki Beach, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Destroyed in 1966.



HAVING BEEN ONLY some three weeks in Hawai'i, Charlot chose a theme for his mural that has since been recognised as the central principle of Hawaiian culture.<sup>29</sup> He wrote in his diary for 7 July 1949: '9 A.M.: Mural commission accepts my subject, i.e.: relation of Man to Nature. Subject: Old Hawaii.'<sup>30</sup> The final title would be 'Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawaii' (Figure 3). The theme is continually expressed in Hawaiian-language literature — which Charlot could not yet read — but I have not found it emphasised in the secondary literature up to that time. That is, Charlot's choice was based on his own insight into Hawaiian culture. Charlot explained the theme:

All works of art are based on both fact and mood. Even though the lower mural contains many details relating to life in old Hawaii, it should not be considered an archeological or historical reconstruction. It is rather an attempt to recapture the mood that led ancient Hawaiians to reach a true balance in their culture between man and his strong natural habitat in the Islands. Ancient Hawaiians lived in a stone age of their own. While present culture is mechanically powerful, this balance between man and nature has not been improved upon since that time.<sup>31</sup>

Hawaiian culture thus provided a lesson for today: 'This mural, then, has as its function the perpetuation through art of the values of a vanished culture . . .'<sup>32</sup> The cause of the vanishing is glimpsed in the outline of Captain James Cook's boat on the horizon. As in Mexico, the foreign culture was in many ways inferior to the native culture it replaced.

Rather than the environment and the human community being separate, in Charlot's mural they form a coherent whole, all bathed in the beautiful local light. The young chiefs look like birds in their feather cloaks as they toss their spears towards the sky. Men walk behind the aerial pandanus roots, which themselves grow forward in steps. Human tools echo natural and human shapes. The sturdy back, neck and head of a man parallel the shape of the double-gourd beside him. The man squatting at one end of a poi board helps form the shape of the poi pounder he wields.

The natural and human world share the organisation into male and female. The warrior on the left and the mother and child on the right of the mural — modelled by my mother and youngest brother, Peter — 'represent the family, then as now the basic element of society'. The left section of the central panel represents the material side of life: food gathering and preparation. The right represents the religious and artistic. The dancers' gesture is 'the opening of a dance in honor of the dead', which Charlot learned from Jennie Wilson. Raising hands to the sky shows 'the preoccupation with the spirit'. A *kahuna* 'priest' looks up as if seeing a vision.<sup>33</sup>

Charlot was presenting Hawaiian culture as a heroic, religious achievement that should be taken seriously today both as thought and as art. Hawaiian sports were not childish but, as in classical Greece, part of a training in excellence, in the perfection of one's own appreciated body. The basis of Hawaiian culture was farming and fishing, which were considered '*oihana'ike* 'intellectual professions', because they required a life-long study of the environment. The fisherman in the mural has all the monumentality

<sup>29</sup> John Charlot, *Chanting the Universe: Hawaiian religious culture* (Honolulu and Hong Kong 1983), 55–78. The work on the large fresco proceeded rapidly, despite serious problems with the plastering that necessitated retouching, which Charlot disliked. Charlot's diary records: 17 Oct. 1949, 'First day ptg. on wall'; 28 Nov., 'Retouch with lime . . . High ball. Celebrate end wall'; 30 Nov., 'last touches of secco on wall'; 19 Jan. 1950, 'unveiling fresco'. Jean Charlot, Diary, JCC.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Charlot, Diary, 7 Jul. 1949, JCC.

<sup>31</sup> Idem, 'University of Hawaii Administration Building frescoes', *Alumni News*, 5 (1954), 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



FIGURE 3: Jean Charlot, 'Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawaii', fresco, 10' x 29', 1949. First floor, Bachman Hall, University of Hawai'i.

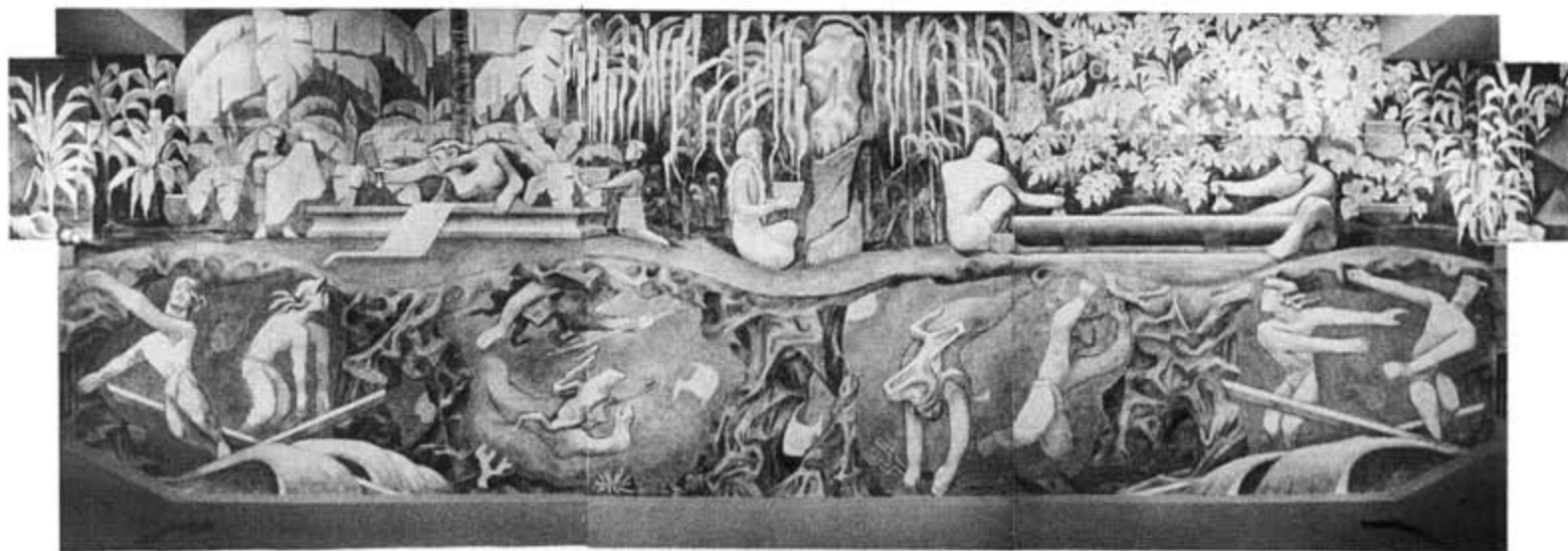


FIGURE 4: Jean Charlot, 'The Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawaii', fresco, 23' x 104', 1974, central section. Leeward Community College, Pearl City, Hawai'i. Photograph: Francis Haar.

appropriate to his role; in his diary, Charlot wrote: 'plan landscape and fisherman to tie up both halves'.<sup>34</sup>

Charlot's majestic presentation of Hawaiian culture surprised most viewers. For instance, few members of the general public were aware of the seriousness of hula as a religious practice or an art form; the major revival of classical hula was over 20 years in the future. Indeed, many residents could not accept Charlot's vision, and argued that he had painted Mexican Indians rather than Hawaiians; this puzzled him because he had used archival photographs and living Hawaiian models. In fact, after being in Hawai'i a summer, Charlot had developed an authentic and seminal understanding of Hawaiian culture; a view that would eventually become accepted and even considered classic. That culture had also inspired one of his greatest murals.<sup>35</sup>

Charlot would continue to deepen his understanding of Hawaiian culture and to develop new ways of expressing it. For instance, he would never again indulge in anachronisms, like including royal palms introduced only later to Hawai'i. More important, Charlot would learn more from Hawaiian literature about the dualistic organisation of the universe by pairs, principally, *luna/lalo* 'up/down', *uka/kai* 'land/sea', and male/female.<sup>36</sup> In 1949, the only pair used organisationally is the last. Charlot perceives much of the classical organisation by male and female: the parallels with plants and the organisation of activities by gender. He also emphasises the interaction of male and female — rather than their separation — for instance in chant and dance. However, the male/female organisation is not carried through consequently; it does not permeate every aspect of the picture. Moreover, Charlot introduces a contrast between material and spiritual — or practical versus religious and artistic — that is Western, not Hawaiian. As he continued to study Hawaiian culture through the years, Charlot became aware of his progress in understanding and expression. In order to record his final vision, he chose for his 1974 monumental fresco the same subject as his first in Hawai'i: 'The Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawaii' (Figure 4).

The general thrust of Charlot's work was, however, firmly established: a greater understanding of and respect for Hawaiian culture, especially when compared to Western. A small but telling example is the contrast implied in Charlot's depiction of King Kamehameha II and the first printing press in his fresco of 1951–52, 'Early Contacts of Hawaii with the Outer World':

*INTERIOR SCENE AT RIGHT: INTRODUCTION OF PRINTING IN THE ISLANDS.*

THE MOMENT DEPICTED IS THAT WHEN KING KAMEHAMEHA THE SECOND INAUGURATED THE FIRST PRESS BY PRINTING WITH HIS OWN HAND HIS NAME. THE PRESS MODEL IS AUTHENTIC.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Idem, Diary, 27 Aug. 1949, JCC.

<sup>35</sup> Charlot was proud of the mural's composition, which accommodated multiple points of view, both vertically and horizontally. He was particularly proud of the figure of the digging man, whose stroke will emerge through the plane of the picture into the space of the viewer: 'A specialised perspective effect was sought in the *imu*-digger, who is placed lower than any of the other figures, in that the illusion of space and bulk remains true even at close range.' Idem, 'University of Hawaii Administration Building frescoes', 10. Interestingly, I have found no contemporary objections to a Hawaiian subject being depicted by a non-Hawaiian. Cooperation between Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians was in fact common in the field.

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion of such dualisms, see John Charlot, 'A pattern in three Hawaiian chants', *Journal of American Folklore*, 96:379 (1983), 64–8; idem, *Classical Hawaiian Education: generations of Hawaiian culture* (Lāie 2005), 16–17, 247–73, 332–5; and idem, 'A note on the Hawaiian prophecy of Kapihe', *Journal of Pacific History*, 39 (2004), 375–77.

<sup>37</sup> Jean Charlot, 'Subject Matter' (underlining and capitals in original). This scene can be viewed on the JCC website, see fn. 1.

Charlot's version is a response to the bas-relief logo and bookplate of the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society in which three fully clothed missionaries overlook (in every sense of the word) a near-naked king far below them straining at the press's winch.<sup>38</sup> Charlot portrays the king more historically in his regal uniform, towering monumentally over the missionary printer assisting him at the lower part of the printing press. Charlot's reversal of the relationship is clear. Similarly, he explained his 1956 fresco 'Chief's Canoe':

that sort of a nobility of what the explorer considered the savage, who was so polite that he could not show his disdain for whatever trinkets the explorer gave him... the Hawaiian chieftain would always be so polite, however ridiculous the things that he may receive in exchange for his own gifts — that were, incidentally, feather things of great value and sculptures of great value. So there is, perhaps there that double take of the civilized savage and the savage explorer, which is an amusing theme, but it allows me to give a dignity, a true dignity, to the theme of the man on his canoe.<sup>39</sup>

JUST AS CHARLOT had learned Náhuatl in Mexico, he now began a long study of the Hawaiian language in order to deepen his understanding of the culture. Language was particularly important in Hawai'i because, after much destruction, the archaeological and artistic remains of the classical culture were sadly fewer than in Mexico. Charlot's decision was significant at the time. The earlier generation of scholars — such as Beckwith, Emory and Elbert — had followed the normal academic practice of learning the language of the people they were studying. Luomala told me that she had been required to learn not only the language of her subjects, but any languages of important secondary literature about them. However, a new line of scholars was emerging, including the historians Ralph Kuykendall and Gavan Daws, that did not learn the language and at times disputed the need to do so. The field thus bifurcated into two sets of writers with those ignorant of the language in the great majority, a split found also in Samoan and New Zealand Māori studies. Fortunately, the emerging generation of scholars seems in the main convinced that language mastery is required for work in the field. Charlot's generation continued to focus on ethnography and literature, for which their language mastery and frequent interchange with Hawaiians prepared them.

Charlot's foundation in the language thus distinguished him among contemporary writers on Hawaiian history and culture. Elbert told me that Charlot was enabled to see things that were invisible to others and to understand what they meant in the context of Hawaiian culture. Reading Hawaiian literature, Charlot could find ample support for his initial impression of the importance of the land in Hawaiian culture.<sup>40</sup> Through his reading, especially of Kepelino, Charlot was able to identify *ka'imi loa* 'the long search' as another key concept.<sup>41</sup> This recognition of the tradition of intellectual and artistic quest illuminated the continuous innovative movement of Hawaiian culture through time. Hawaiians were colleagues of searchers everywhere, and their findings and insights were contributions to our understanding of ourselves and our place in the universe.

<sup>38</sup> The image is a modification of a 1921 plaque by Roger Noble Burnham. See *Hawaiian Mission Children's Society: one hundred and first annual report for the year ending April 30 1953* (Honolulu 1953), 2. The image has been used in various ways by the society.

<sup>39</sup> Jean Charlot, taped interview, 1 Oct. 1970, JCC; idem, 'Chief's Canoe', Hilton Hawaii Village, now at the Hawai'i Convention Center, 8' x 20', 1956.

<sup>40</sup> John Charlot, *Chanting the Universe*, 55–78.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 115–26; Idem, *Classical Hawaiian Education*, 2, 4, 7–8, 424.



Charlot regularly attended Hawaiian language classes over the next years, mainly from Samuel H. Elbert but also from the Reverend Edward Kahale. Charlot joked that he was the only person ever to take fourth-year Hawaiian for seven years. Charlot also discussed language matters at length with such native speakers as Dorothy Kahananui, Koana Wilcox and Rubellite Kawena Johnson. In his liner notes for his 1963 *Three Plays of Ancient Hawaii*, he referred to his own 'dogged efforts to master the Hawaiian language, which span the fifteen years of his stay in the Islands'.<sup>42</sup> Charlot never achieved conversational fluency but read extensively in the Hawaiian-language newspapers, Sheldon Dibble's *Ka Moolelo Hawaii* (the Hawaiian history gathered by native scholars), and in such authors as Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau, S. N. Hale'ole and Kepelino, whom he considered the greatest prose stylist of the 19th century.<sup>43</sup> Charlot made a special study of the Kumulipo, the only surviving major chant of the origin of the universe: over 2000 lines long, it is a peerless expression of the Hawaiian world-view.<sup>44</sup>

Even more than the content of Hawaiian writings, Charlot was studying their mode of expression, entering into their way of thinking:

The languages I had learned in Europe shared the common bond of a classical past. Latin is a potent drill-master and all of them — French, German, English, Spanish — obediently toed the line with close to a robotlike precision. Pacific languages formed themselves under a very different kind of spell. Surrounded as he was by the ocean, the Hawaiian modelled his tongue after what he knew best, watching the octopus as it embraced the stone lure with spiralling motions synchronized with those of heaving surf and undertow currents.

Euclidean fashions inform European languages, each theorem lucidly stated and cleanly solved. It could be said that Pacific languages come closer to post-Euclidean lines, contracting, expanding, with distortions as complex and boneless as are the motions of a cephalopod.<sup>45</sup>

Charlot's admiration for Hawaiian literature reinforced his high estimation of the culture as a whole: 'The ancient texts of an epic character enthused him, and he translated them freely into English.'<sup>46</sup> That literature also stimulated his own poetic talents. Elbert admired the translations Charlot made for class: 'As an example of the poetic possibilities in translation, there is the following [chant] ... as translated by Jean Charlot, not only an artist but poet also and Hawaiian scholar';<sup>47</sup> 'Charlot's translations are much closer to the spirit of the original Hawaiian'.<sup>48</sup> Charlot produced a large number of writings on Hawaiian history and culture — including art reviews in local newspapers — which I will not discuss here.<sup>49</sup>

HAWAIIAN LITERATURE ALSO inspired Charlot to return to theatre, which had interested him since childhood.<sup>50</sup> In Mexico, he had written two puppet plays in Náhuatl. Charlot felt that theatre would be an excellent means of displaying Hawaiian culture to a contemporary audience, to show its integration of the environment, ways of life, the arts,

<sup>42</sup> Jean Charlot, *Three Plays of Ancient Hawaii* (Honolulu 1963).

<sup>43</sup> [Sheldon Dibble, ed.], *Ka Moolelo Hawaii: I Kakaia E Kekahi Mau Haumana O Ke Kulanui, A I Hooponoponoia E Kekahi Kumu O Ia Kula* (Lahainaluna [Lahaina] 1838); Martha Warren Beckwith (ed.), *Kepelino's Traditions of Hawaii*. *Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin* 95 (Honolulu 1932).

<sup>44</sup> Idem (tr. and ed.), *The Kumulipo, a Hawaiian creation chant* (Chicago 1951).

<sup>45</sup> Jean Charlot, *Two Hawaiian Plays*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Idem, press notice on playwriting.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel H. Elbert, 'Introduction', in idem (ed.), *Selections from Fornander's Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-Lore*, illus. Jean Charlot (Honolulu 1959), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Samuel H. Elbert, 'Preface', in Jean Charlot, *Three Plays of Ancient Hawaii* (Honolulu 1963), vi.

<sup>49</sup> The JCC website has several examples. See fn.1.

<sup>50</sup> John Charlot, 'Jean Charlot's Hawaiian-Language Plays', *Rongorongo Studies*, 8:1 (1998), 3-24.

and historical events. Hawaiian clothing, art works, and artefacts — designed or created by Charlot — could be seen used together in their life setting. Theatre was also close to Hawaiian forms of story-telling, for instance, the *hula ki'i* 'image hula', in which dialog between the puppets was chanted.

Charlot's first publication was *Three Plays of Ancient Hawaii* (1963): *Moa a Moi, Chicken into King*, the first written, was the story of the great chief Umi; *U'i A U'i, Beauty Meets Beauty* was a combination of traditions of the volcano goddess Pele and the love story of Halemano; *Na'auao, The Light Within*, was based on the story of the anti-hero Kawelo, whom Charlot reinterpreted as an artist. *Na'auao* was produced in April 1962 by the Honolulu Community Theatre under Don Tescher.

Elbert wrote an important preface for the publication, appreciating the plays from the perspective of a long-time scholar of Hawaiian literature.<sup>51</sup> He demonstrated that Charlot had used Hawaiian traditional figurative expressions and narrative motifs in his plays to give them an authentically classical form of communication:

These phrases are so well known to Hawaiians that an eager listener in the opening-night audience, Jennie Wilson, aged ninety and versed in the lore of her people, said that she could repeat the Hawaiian to herself as she heard the English.<sup>52</sup>

Elbert enjoyed hearing Hawaiian chants presented in their original setting in life. Charlot had also seen hidden or unrecognised currents in Hawaiian history, such as class tensions, resentment of tabus and the presence of unbelievers; these elements can indeed be found in the sources. But Charlot was not just reproducing traditions; he had innovated on them, for instance, interpreting Kawelo not only as a chief but as an artist. Finally, Elbert appreciated Charlot's recognition of the lively humour of Hawaiian literature, usually absent from solemn presentations of native cultures. Humour is in fact the most incomprehensible aspect of a foreign culture and a fine knowledge of the language is required to get a joke. Charlot wrote of himself:

Purists shy from the freedom with which he dares to handle ancient sources. Charlot answers that only thus could he keep intact the flow of the ancient epics, and carry into English their unique climate, of a drama spiced with a sense of humor.<sup>53</sup>

A number of pageants and performances had been given in Hawaiian since contact, but Charlot wrote and published the first Hawaiian-language plays: *Two Hawaiian Plays: Hawaiian English* (1976).<sup>54</sup> *Laukiamanukahiki, Snare-That-Lures-a-Farflung Bird* was based on a story from the Abraham Fornander Collection, and *Na Lono Elua, Two Lonos* dramatised the death of Captain James Cook, as seen from the Hawaiian side.<sup>55</sup> A particular purpose of writing in Hawaiian was to expose the audience to the classical language. Oral Hawaiian had been reduced to writing and in the continuing process of its standardisation, Charlot felt, much of its flexibility and variability was being lost. Charlot therefore copied the received Hawaiian texts and arranged them in a narrative with connecting passages of his own composition. After a long process of consultation with Elbert and native Hawaiian

<sup>51</sup> Elbert, 'Preface', v–ix.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>53</sup> Charlot, *Three Plays*, liner notes.

<sup>54</sup> Idem, *Two Hawaiian Plays: Hawaiian English* (Honolulu 1976).

<sup>55</sup> Abraham Fornander, *Fornander Collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-Lore*. Memoirs of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Vol. 4 (Honolulu 1916–17), 596–609.

speakers — including the actors in the 1964 production of *Laukiamanuiakahi* — the final form of the plays was achieved.<sup>56</sup>

A purpose of all Charlot's plays was to present an accurate picture of Hawaiian culture, which he felt would support the growing movement of Hawaiian ethnic consciousness. Indeed, one reason for his choice of the subject of *Na Lono Elua* was that the killing of Captain Cook was often portrayed as a crime and had been used since contact to lower the Hawaiians' self-image and morale. Understanding that event in the Hawaiian perspective was, therefore, unusually important, and Charlot was very disappointed that the play was never produced. When produced, the plays did have positive results. Elbert recalled: 'one member of the cast of *Na'auao* said at the end of the season: "Lately I've been very proud of being Hawaiian."'<sup>57</sup>

'I like to talk, but I prefer to paint'.<sup>58</sup> Charlot also used Hawaiian visual arts as a foundation for his own, as can be seen in his work with petroglyphs. Again Charlot pioneered the evaluation of petroglyphs as a high art form:

the only petroglyphs I saw at the beginning were some very poor things that were used decoratively and in shops and so on and always with the tendency of being funny. I remember there were some little petroglyph drawings in magazines and so that were made to enliven the page. But of course, I was on the look-out so to speak for the visual arts in Hawai'i and very soon, for example, I went to the slopes down the Royal Mausoleum in Nu'uano, and there of course found a whole series of those things.<sup>59</sup>

At petroglyph sites, Charlot made rubbings, which he felt enabled him to enter into the creative act of the Hawaiian artist:

It's like you go to the Louvre or to the Metropolitan Museum and you copy the Old Masters. You don't pretend that you are an Old Master. But by repeating the lines, the proportions, and so on, you gather something that the guys who did the things — it may be Titian, it may be Poussin, it may be the old Hawaiian — had I wouldn't say in mind, but the very rhythm, the very rhythm of their hand, of their wrist, and so on, is repeated as you copy the petroglyphs.<sup>60</sup>

He carefully mounted his rubbings as Chinese scrolls and compared them to his equally inspiring work as an archeological draftsman at Chich'en Itza. He recorded his conclusions in articles and in the script for a film on petroglyphs.<sup>61</sup>

Charlot also incorporated petroglyphs into his own art: the tiles in his home, prints, a mural, and a monumental sculpture.<sup>62</sup> Petroglyphs also had an influence on his own style, an influence that culminated in the fresco at Leeward Community College (Figure 4). That is, just as Charlot had used Aztec and Maya art in Mexico to create an

<sup>56</sup> John Charlot, 'Jean Charlot's Hawaiian-Language Plays', 11–17.

<sup>57</sup> Elbert, Preface, ix.

<sup>58</sup> Jean Charlot's narration in George Tahara (filmmaker), 'Petroglyphs of Hawaii', documentary film, Cine-Pic Hawaii, Honolulu, 1960.

<sup>59</sup> Charlot, taped interview. 26 Mar. 1978, JCC.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., idem, *An Artist on Art*, 235–49; idem, narration in Tahara, 'Petroglyphs of Hawaii'. Rubbings are now forbidden as potentially damaging to the petroglyphs.

<sup>62</sup> The main examples are the following. Prints: 'Moanalua Petroglyphs', 1973 (Morse, *Jean Charlot's Prints*, nos 641–57); Mural: 'Hawaiian Petroglyphs', Alfred Preis home, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 9½' wide by 4½' high. 4 Jun. 1955; Sculpture: 'In Praise of Petroglyphs', Moanalua Intermediate School, Honolulu, Hawai'i, copper plate and champlevé enamel sculpture, 8' high, begun May 1972, installed 7 Apr. 1973.

authentic national style, so he was using Hawaiian art to depict the new place and culture he was experiencing:

Some of the frescoes I painted in Hawaii use petroglyph themes. I have loved the ancient carver's art enough to try to borrow the outer form of his dogs and his ghosts as a key to his mood. Is it fair, is it unfair, to use these ancient forms today? Why not? Europe has its classical art, its Venus of Milo, its Greco-Roman remains ... The Hawaiian rock drawings are a true part of the classical past of Hawaii. Nature and man have not changed much within this millennium, and the art of old Hawaii remains the most perfect expression of Hawaiian culture.<sup>63</sup>

HAWAIIAN CULTURE INSPIRED Charlot's art and writing; it also expanded his thinking and spirituality. The basis of Hawaiian culture is the appreciation of the universe. That cosmos is not perceived as dark, as in Mexico, or fallen, as in Christianity, but as the ultimate and beautiful reality, mysterious and numinous, worthy of our study and wonder. Charlot had thus encountered a religion that saw the universe as he himself had since his earliest childhood, a view he had found neither in his Christianity nor in Mexican Indian religion. Hawaiians bathe in their environment like a swimmer in the ocean, a major new subject of Charlot's art. Hawaiians recognise the beauty of their world, deepen their appreciation of it through contemplation, reach a religious identification with it, and express that identity in their many arts. Charlot's portrait of Iolani Luahine records his observation of this process.<sup>64</sup> Sitting on the floor in Charlot's living-room, Luahine had noticed the garden hedge moving slightly in the breeze. She became entranced by the sight and, as she looked at the hedge, her arms slowly rose and began to dance it. Similarly, the featherworker Johanna Cluney had visions of her works before she made them:

those people have at least a third of their being in sort of a spiritual plane. To begin with, they live on visions. Johanna was having those visions about her art. And they were real visions. They saw the things she was going to do, not in a dream because she was awake, but as a vision.<sup>65</sup>

Hawaiian culture had the synergy of religion and art that was central to Charlot's character, life, and work.

Charlot was a convinced Roman Catholic but had a strong positive sympathy and respect for other religions. When the French poet Paul Claudel wrote satirically of Aztec gods, Charlot let him know that they were his ancestors.<sup>66</sup> At Chich'en Itza, the Maya recognised Charlot's spiritual sympathy and invited him to participate in one of their secret pagan rituals; he declined because he felt he could not do so as a Catholic. Charlot had similar positive views of the Hawaiian gods. When I told my father that the Hawaiian psychic Morrnah Simeona had figured out that he had been a Hawaiian in a previous life, but had not said who, Charlot said immediately 'Kekuaokalani', the young chief who had died defending the old religion after its overthrow in 1819. Perhaps independently, Charlot adopted the view of several 19th-century Hawaiian writers that their old gods were God's angels or servants. Charlot joked that God had sent the gods to care for the Hawaiians until the French Catholic missionaries could arrive.

Charlot believed that Hawaiian religious culture had an important contribution to make to Christianity, a religion that was not a nugget of truth to be preserved

<sup>63</sup> Jean Charlot, *An Artist on Art*, 240.

<sup>64</sup> Idem, 'Iolani Luahine, Kneeling Hula', oil painting, 38" x 48", 1976, cited in idem, Checklist, no. 1350, unpublished ms., JCC.

<sup>65</sup> Idem, taped interview, 24 Mar. 1978, JCC.

<sup>66</sup> John Charlot, 'Jean Charlot as Paul Claudel's Ixtlilxóchitl', 68-70.

intact but a seed that grew different plants as it was sown in different soils. Christianity was infinitely complicated and deep, and only as it spread through the world — only as different cultures discovered and articulated in it dimensions unappreciated before — could it achieve its fullness. The Aztecs with their long tradition of ritual torture and human sacrifice could understand the death of Christ as no one else could. For Charlot, Hawaiian culture had developed the best word for Christian love. Greek *agape* and Latin *caritas* had inappropriate connotations and omitted too much of what Jesus meant. Christianity had to reach Hawai'i to learn the word *aloha*.

Charlot's Christianity had a mystic strain emphasised in his religious education in France. He spoke only in general terms about his own religious experiences and never mentioned any connected to Mexican Indian religion. He did, however, record publicly a classic Hawaiian religious experience. This uncharacteristic act indicates the importance he attached to the event. On 30 July 1977, Charlot was walking with visiting family members in the volcano district of Puna on the island of Hawai'i. He was already much weakened by the cancer that would soon kill him. They came to a place near the shore with large black volcanic boulders, between which *hala* or pandanus trees were growing and dropping their dead leaves over the rocks and ground:

They wanted to visit the beach. I didn't walk well then. They left me sitting twenty minutes on the fallen *hala* leaves. I heard the sound of drumming, though I never saw the drummer.<sup>67</sup>

Charlot expressed this auditory vision in oil paintings and the serigraph '*Hala Grove, Kahuwai, Puna, Hawai'i*'.<sup>68</sup> Charlot depicts the site and, in slightly smaller scale than realistic, the godly drummer.

CHARLOT'S LAST MONUMENTAL depiction of Hawaiian culture was, as stated above, his 1974 mural at Leeward Community College: 'The Relation of Man and Nature in Old Hawaii' (Figure 4). He chose the same theme and title as his first fresco in Hawai'i of 1949 to show what he had learned in 25 years of study (Figure 3). Charlot described several points of contrast. The first mural emphasised the human body:

I was chock full of, well, in knowledge and the tradition of Western art, which after all, coming from Greek art, considers the human body the most important cog in nature; in our little universe, not the great universe, but the little universe. And there I remain a Western classic, if you want, in the sense that the human body is the language of that first fresco.<sup>69</sup>

In the Leeward mural, the cosmos is the all-encompassing reality of which human beings are a component. This view was much closer to Hawaiian thinking and to his own as an artist:

That man, the king of the Creation, which we can get of course from the Good Book, that is, God gives us the animals and the plants, and the this and the that to do with as we wish — is something that some other cultures have not felt. The sense of mystery on the contrary and the sense of being the size we are — that is, if we measure our body — the size we are in a nature that has many other things of a more colossal size, brings a sense of mystery. And also that sense that it's not always nature that is our servant, but man is, in so many ways, lost in nature. One of the phrases, I think, that recur in some of my plays, is to walk on tiptoe in nature. And that's the opposite of man the master of our little universe. And it happens that that thing,

<sup>67</sup> Jean Charlot, quoted in Morse, *Jean Charlot's Prints: a catalogue supplement* (Honolulu 1983), 17.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 748.

<sup>69</sup> Charlot, taped interview, 24 Mar. 1978, JCC.



which I think I was born with, that sense of mystery and walking on tiptoe, which I've done all my life, is something that I had not tied up to the Hawaiians. When I tied it up to the Hawaiians, I felt much more brotherly. There was a link there in some of the deepest part of our relationship to nature — both the Hawaiians and myself... And that Hawaiian sense of mystery and tiptoeing, again, is something that was in me. You can call it prefiguration that certainly receives its exterior figuration in Hawai'i, and as such, I think that my view of the Hawaiians and so on has a certain validity.<sup>70</sup>

The Leeward mural is also a more complete view of the Hawaiian world:

...And then coming to an island, it took me some time to find out the submarine reality of the island, which is a mountain, and *that* is not represented at all in the first fresco. The first fresco represents the plateau that we call the islands of Hawai'i. In the second one, you get a profile cut, so to speak, into the situation of the island in the ocean, and the submarine reality comes forcefully.<sup>71</sup>

Most important, the new organisation of his composition reflected the impact of Hawaiian thinking. The first mural was:

a landscape with figures, but a landscape as it is understood in Western art, which is on a horizontal with different planes... And it's only later... that I got that idea of the vertical cut into the landscape which brings in the island, where the horizon of the sea is represented by a simple line, which is in fact in the foreground, and the lower part, the mountain submerged, has the same value. And of course that we have — and I found it out later — we have in the Kumulipo with that continuous zigzag of the thought of the author of Kumulipo, the questions and answers between earth and sea, between earth and sea, which are obviously based on a vertical instead of a horizontal.<sup>72</sup>

Charlot is referring to the repeated use of the pair *uka* 'land' and *kai* 'sea' in the stanza passages of the first four sections of the Kumulipo: '*Hānau ka [blank] noho i kai/Kia'i 'ia e ka [blank] noho i uka*', 'Born is the [blank] living in the sea/Guarded by the [blank] living on land'.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, the influence of petroglyphs on the style of the mural is, I believe, apparent. For instance, Charlot displays a petroglyph dog on a rock and next to it a 'real' dog in the style of the fresco:

a large dog on the rock — on purpose at the side I put a real dog... Now my real dog would not seem a real dog to many people, but anyhow he's *supposed* to be, with flesh and bones and what not. The point there is to show that the artist really presents a spiritual image of the material world, so that there is a degree of petroglyphness in the things. For me, the real dog, what I call the real dog in Leeward, is a dog of flesh and bones, and the other one is spiritualized or, if you want, carried into the esthetic plane in that sense of what I called before liturgical arts, which to me has a great reality in all the things that Hawaiians do.<sup>74</sup>

Another influence on the style of the figures — simple forms with strong outlines — was that Charlot was worried that he might die before he completed the mural and wanted a style that someone else could execute if necessary.

<sup>70</sup> Idem, taped interview, 11 Apr. 1978, JCC.

<sup>71</sup> Idem, taped interview, 24 Mar. 1978, JCC.

<sup>72</sup> Idem, taped interview, 26 Mar. 1978, JCC.

<sup>73</sup> I have regularised the text. Cf. Beckwith, *The Kumulipo*, 188.

<sup>74</sup> Jean Charlot, taped interview, 26 Mar. 1978, JCC.

The mural is a comprehensive picture of the Hawaiian world and the life led within it according to Hawaiian thinking. The unrealistic, schematic depiction — unlike the first mural — enables Charlot to reveal the use of the main pairs by which Hawaiians organise their universe: *luna/lalo* 'up/down', *uka/kai* 'land/sea', and male/female. The *luna/lalo* pair is seen in the clear vertical division of zones: sea, land and the mountains and sky represented by the orange-red glow of the volcano. Charlot had wanted a wall in vertical format to show this upper zone explicitly; when given a horizontal wall, he used colour non-realistically to call that zone to mind. The *uka/kai* pair is interconnected by up-and-down motions, 'that continuous zigzag of the thought of the author of Kumulipo':<sup>75</sup> the corkscrewing upwards of the columns of coral and the spiralling downwards and upwards of the swimming figures. In the land, the *uka* itself, the pandanus roots descend towards the earth, and the stone god image rises from the ground along with the priest's prayer and the scent of the offered kawa.

The male/female pair permeates the whole, expressing an inescapable theme of the genealogical chant. Each of the first six sections is headed by a parent pair, and the stanzas of the first four sections begin with a reference to *kāne* 'male' and *wahine* 'female' (starting at line 34). The theme is emphasised throughout, e.g. '*O kāne ia, 'o ka wahine kēlā*, 'The male this, the female that' (line 273).<sup>76</sup> As in the 1949 mural, a woman and a man frame the central section. On the eastern end of the mural, where the sun rises, the woman chants a *mele hānau*, a chant celebrating a birth. At her feet two rocks lie before the mouth of a conch shell to represent birth and to display the sexuality of the mineral world: the whole universe indeed begins with the mating of earth and sky. On the western end, where the sun goes down, an artist carves a petroglyph to commemorate a deceased chief. Between these figures, the universe and the community are classified, more knowledgeably and systematically than before, as male and female: the woman beats tapa and the men pound poi, all surrounded by the appropriate male or female plants. Male and female are not to be separated but join to promote the fertility of the universe. In the very center of the mural an old priest offers a bowl of kawa to the standing god stone. The stone has the shape Charlot used consistently; it is based on a 1934 oil painting of a nude of my mother seen from the back.<sup>77</sup> The stone is female and the priest is male. Sitting erect, he takes on the shape of male genitalia. He sits on the female side of the mural and the stone stands on the male. They thus link the two sides together.

Charlot has abandoned his 1949 distinctions between material and spiritual, practical and artistic. Art and religion permeate and unify all aspects of Hawaiian life. The tapa the woman beats will be a work of art as well as clothing. The poi board and pounders are as beautiful as any sculpture. Sports, swimming and surfing, have the grace and elegance of dance.

The totality is not static or monistic. The pairs demand movement. Unity is in its shared rhythm: the beating of the gourd to the chant, the pecking of the rock for the petroglyph, the beating of the tapa and the pounding of the poi. Hawaiians are moving with the rising and the setting of the sun, with the splashing of the waves in which the young men sport. All are interconnected in the rhythmic energy of sexuality that flows from the original mating of earth and sky generation after generation until the universe is completed and continues to perpetuate itself. All have their part, including the old priest, who makes his offering of thanks and raises his prayer — his art — of appreciation.

JOHN CHARLOT

<sup>75</sup> See fn. 74 above.

<sup>76</sup> I have regularised the text. Cf. Beckwith, *The Kumulipo*, 188, 194.

<sup>77</sup> Jean Charlot, 'Nude, back, arms raised', 38" x 28", oil painting, 1934, cited in idem, Checklist, no. 381, unpublished ms., JCC.