

## Darrell Orwig

AN INTERVIEW WITH INGER TULLY

For almost four decades, Darrell has shared his enthusiasm for life in his paintings. Now in a retrospective at Hui No'EAU Visual Arts Center, the community will have an opportunity to experience the scope of Darrell's work and his unique perspective on life. We asked Inger Tully, curator of exhibitions for The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu (and formerly of Hui No'EAU), if she would interview Darrell about his upcoming exhibition.



CARL WHEN HE WAS 16; 4½" x 7";  
acrylic on shaped canvas

Hey there! Guess where I am—on the deck of my boat!" This is the greeting I get when I call to tell Darrell I've landed on Maui for our interview. My heart sinks and he continues. "It's grounded at Chris' house, but boy does it feel good just to be sitting here! When are you coming over?"

I arrive at his house an hour later and he is ready for show and tell. "Hey, did you see these?" He shows me his latest, a series of horses made of clay. "I was thinking of making a 100 of them for an installation on the gallery floor." Next is a series of exquisite pastel landscapes capturing Maui and various road trips created for his upcoming retrospective at Hui No'EAU, "I've been doing one a day for the past two months." As we move through the house to the back room we pass paintings, drawings, and prints, each work offering a glimpse into the adventurous life of Darrell Orwig. Darrell and I get comfortable and begin to talk story.

INGER: I hate to do this to you Darrell, but can you start at the beginning? What were some of the moments, experiences and people that influenced your life as an artist?

DARRELL: I was raised in rural towns of Oregon, Washington, and California and went to 21 different schools before graduating. Along the way I always had fantastic teachers from 1st grade on. In fact I don't remember ever having a dud. I had this art teacher, his name was Mr. Wyatt. He took an interest in what I was doing and cleared a space in the storage closet of the art room and had me copy old masters. That was my job. When I came to class I went to my space and drew. He gave me all the supplies I needed.

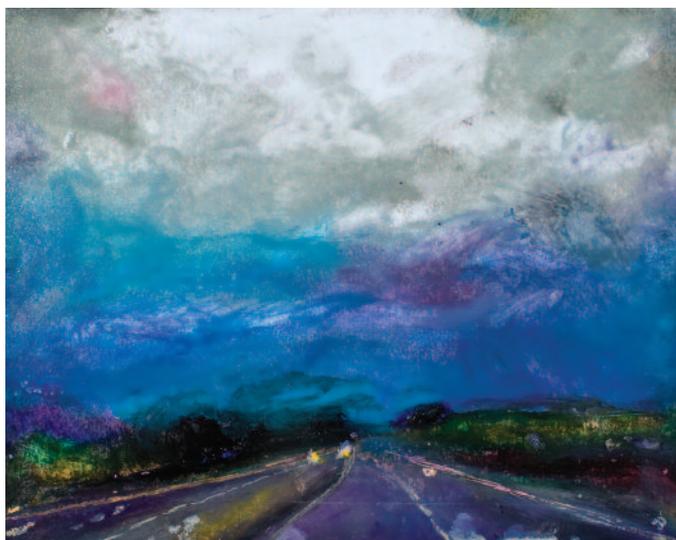
Here's another one: second grade in Salem Oregon, I had a revelation where the light went on. I was sitting next to this kid, it was drawing time. It was 1952, and up to that point I was doing the same imagery as the other kids: the upper horizon was here and the lower horizon was here and the orb for the sun



DARRELL ORWIG  
Waltzing with Time and Place  
A Retrospective

MARCH 12 - APRIL 22  
HUI NO'EAU VISUAL ARTS CENTER  
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The artist at home, as photographed by Tony Novak-Clifford



Haleakala Highway (LATE FOR DINNER WITH BILL); 4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"; oil pastel

was there. I looked over at this kid's drawing, and he had colored all the way down to the horizon line. I looked out the window, and yes, the sky was all the way down. From then on, I started to put down what I saw, and I learned to look for myself.

Another highlight was in Coos Bay Oregon, fifth grade. I entered a statewide contest sponsored by the Park Service. I got a prize of really neat illustration books. Those pictures really came alive for me! That was when I first started looking at illustration as a narrative to stories. I was picky about illustrated books, and I got upset when the illustrations didn't look real. This was a constant dilemma for me. I had an obsession with reality. I could go back to three or four years old. I would get upset if a toy car or truck didn't look like the real thing. I'd say, 'I don't want that toy.' If there was a chance I could exchange it, I wanted the one that looked like the real thing. Or I would get an electric train set, and the telephone poles were out of scale. That drove me nuts! It set me on a course I've never been able to shake. I can't get away from representational imagery as a vehicle for whatever concept I'm using or exploring at the time. God knows I've tried, but when I venture away from that it's not me. I'm trying to be something I'm not.

*I wish I had room to tell you about Darrell's Jr. prom backdrop of Blue Hawai'i and his crush on Annie Oakley. If you see Darrell, ask for details.*

INGER: So 21 schools later you graduate from high school. How did college go?

DARRELL: College came as a shock! No one cared. It was up to you, and the teachers were all trying to make you think! The art department was excellent. It was like an onion, and as time went by you peeled back the layers and got more exposure to serious practicing artists.

I took some time off and went to Europe with my friend John. We had a great time, traveling to Rome, Heidelberg and Switzerland. We were walking the same streets as Mozart! In Milan I saw several of Michaelangelo's last sculptures, and, well, I got upset. I thought, that can't possibly be a Michaelangelo, someone is pulling my leg. Later we join this guy who was getting his MFA in sculpture, and I laid into him about how what we saw didn't look like a Michaelangelo sculpture. He just looked at me speechless and that was basically the end of the visit. That was a revelation, and from that day forward I learned that before you pass judgment on something, you need to know what you are talking about.

When I returned to Chico State and started my art classes the lights came on in droves! One teacher, Steve Wilson, taught us how to think about art as the whole thing that plays out. You live and breath it. An explosion of information and insight came to me about how big and broad the whole art world is. Then graduation comes, and you get the notice to pay your fines at the library and you graduate. Now what do you do?



above, top to bottom:

TRAIN MUD FLATS, KARKENES LATE PM; 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"; oil pastel

TRAIN FIELD SOUTH OF SACRAMENTO PM; 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"; oil pastel

TRAIN PG & E TOWER SHADOWS PM; 2<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" x 4<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"; oil pastel

NEW MEXICO MESA; 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"; oil pastel

Art Photography by Zach Pezillo

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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## Darrell Orwig CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

INGER: Tell me about your first day in Hawai'i. Did you start on Maui?

DARRELL: I arrived in Honolulu in 1970. I was on a MAC (military airlift command) flight. I was wearing a wool suit. I remember walking off the plane and being hit with two smells—jet fuel and plumeria—and the fact that I was soaking wet with sweat. I worked three years at Schofield Barricks' arts and craft center teaching and setting up the studios.

INGER: And so how did you get to Maui?

DARRELL: The first time was for a show at Sandi Stoners gallery *Creations*, in Kahului—which she ran with Jody Baldwin and Wendy Meekof (Baldwin). Jody flew me over, and I stayed at Idlewild. She took me on a tour of the island, and I was snapping pictures as fast as I could take them, all in black and white. When I got back to Honolulu, I did 25 paintings from the photographs I took. I couldn't believe it, but that exhibition sold out.

INGER: Then you moved to Maui?

DARRELL: It was Dick Nelson's fault! He started the Wailea Art Center in 1976 and asked me to join him. I was there for six months before Sandi Stoner asked me to help start Hui No'eau at Kaluanui. I was there at the beginning and watched it grow and develop. We created the photography studio out of the basement, a ceramic studio out of the stables, and a painting studio out of the bedroom. It's amazing what that place offers you as you interact with all the people. I was there for nine years.

I started working as a photojournalist for the Coast Guard and ended up as the Coast Guard recruiter for Maui. I'd been in for about four or five years and was commissioned as an officer. I was ready for a new adventure so we moved to Seattle. From there I got extended duty in Washington, DC, and ended up in Saudi Arabia as part of a long tradition of combat artists. A lot of what I did was to talk to people, and based on their stories I would develop a

drawing. I did about twenty-one of them. Turns out I may have been the first Coast Guard combat artist since World War II.

INGER: So then you came back to Maui?

DARRELL: Yes, I was back on Maui working for the non-profit, Ka Lima O Maui. I got a call from Chris Cowan asking if I would be interested in helping develop the gallery programs at the MACC. I said yes, and never looked back. The thing about being the gallery director all those years was working with such incredible artists. You work with artists like Masami Teraoka and Lisa Reihana, one outrageous person after another. After fourteen years, I wrapped it up with the Rembrandt and Dürer exhibition!

*It was now time for me to catch my flight back to Honolulu so I ask Darrell for any last words.*

DARRELL: I think back on something that started happening when I taught Art 101 at Maui Community College. I started for the first time connecting the span of art history in all the major societies. I would see lights go on in my students' minds, and it felt so good to just present how big and expansive art is. Not just visual arts but how other aspects of art cross over, going on and on and on. When you can present that to people, that makes my day. Each person who gets out there as an artist and gives back to an audience may not understand it, but their art opens the door for others to discover new worlds. ■

KODACHROME, WAR DREAM  
16" x 16" acrylic on wood panel



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