

# THE GARDEN ISLAND

SUNDAY • AUGUST 20, 2006 • ONLINE: WWW.KAUAIWORLD.COM



Dennis Fujimoto / The Garden Island

Work on lauhala craft continues as Margaret Lovett and artist Fred Tangalin remember master weaver Auntie Esther Makuaoale during the unveiling of her oil portrait Saturday in the Kaua'i Museum.

## Auntie Esther lives on in the rustle of the lauhala

Dennis Fujimoto  
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When weaving lauhala, there is no noise save the occasional rustling of dried fronds as they scrape together in a mischievous dance.

Weavers' hands do the talking amidst the unique aroma that melded with the antiques in the Kaua'i Museum.

"I can almost hear her behind me with that 'heh, heh, heh,' of hers," said Margaret Lovett, the instructor of the monthly lauhala class that met Saturday. "It's like she came home."

Positioned on the wall, garbed in a brilliant red dress and a lauhala papale (hat) on her head, Esther Makuaoale's hands were indeed speaking as fronds of lauhala went this way and that in a symphony that harmonized with the movement of the six students' work on the table below.

For 15 years, Makuaoale came twice weekly to the museum and shared her talent and love of lauhala weaving with visitors and residents, states a tribute to the master weaver produced by the

Kaua'i Museum.

Her presence and wit inspired the continuation of this folk art as she was able to pull her wit from ongoing conversation and weave it into her project.

"This was her corner," said Lovett, who is also the collections manager for the museum. "She would park herself right there in front of the corner and had her lauhala and her hats spread out."

It was in this setting that local artist Fred Tangalin was inspired to do an oil portrait of the master weaver for the Schaefer Portrait Challenge on Maui.

"I was trying to figure out who to paint for this Challenge," Tangalin said. "I walked into the museum and saw her from across the room. She was aloha personified."

Tangalin said he went up and studied her while talking to her and took some photographs.

"She told me, 'You want to paint a picture of an old lady?'" Tangalin said.

That portrait was one of three accepted into the Maui art competition. And it was one of the few that was pictured in the event's catalog.

"When I talked to her, I saw the life she dedicated to lauhala weaving. She was humble," Tangalin said. "She was the image of aloha spirit and it was really challenging to show the radiance of that aloha spirit in her weaving."

Following Makuaoale's passing in May, Tangalin said the painting first hung in his home, then in his gallery in Kekaha.

"I was thinking about selling it," the artist said. "But then it dawned on me to bring it back to the place where she spent her time weaving so it would enrich the spirit of weaving."

That led to the dedication Saturday, a ceremony as private as the six students, their instructors and supporters, but as public as the people who stopped to chat with the master weaver on those days she spent hours sitting cross-legged in the corner of the museum.

Trustees of the Kaua'i Museum selected her a Living Treasure of Kaua'i and Ni'ihau for perpetuating the craft of lauhala weaving.

Hanna Kamoe, Makuaoale's daughter,

See Esther, A8

# Esther

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gifted the Kaua'i Museum with three of Makuaole's prized hats: one made of the rare makaloa sedge, one anoi, or two colored, and one with two rows of niho, or points.

Additionally, a wooden hand crank for softening lauhala and a rare 'ie'ie basket made for Makuaole were also presented.

The presence of the painting, the remembrances of the master weaver, the aroma and shuffling of dried lauhala fronds served to rekindle stories of the

matriarch whom Lovett said was remembered at her funeral by the appearance of hundreds of lauhala hats.

"It was kind of like a Hat Day on Kaua'i," Lovett said. "There were some that you would never otherwise see."

From her perch on the wall, Auntie Esther continued her weaving, her head down, her fingers talking.

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**► Dennis Fujimoto,**  
*photographer and staff  
writer, can be reached  
at 245-3681 (ext. 253) or  
dfujimoto@kauaipubco.  
com.*