

June 27, 2014 - February 08, 2015
Honolulu Museum of Art

Encounters with Hawai'i: Art in an Age of Exploration, 1778–1820

Exhibition Overview

This exhibition brings together artwork associated with the European navigational voyages of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These lengthy expeditions explored and charted the lands that dotted the Pacific, and they carried with them painters, draftsmen, scientists, and cartographers, who documented the flora, fauna, terrain, and inhabitants of the distant lands they encountered. The drawings, paintings, and prints they generated comprise the earliest visual record of Hawai'i.

The exhibition begins with the British painter and draftsman John Webber, who traveled with Captain James Cook's third and final voyage, from 1776 to 1780. This expedition brought Cook and his crew to Hawai'i, and Webber, as its official artist, pictured their experiences and discoveries in an elaborate series of drawings and watercolors, which were published to illustrate the official narrative of Cook's travels.

Subsequent trips brought additional artists—most notably the Russian Louis Choris and the Frenchman Jacques Arago—who depicted Hawaiian religion and customs before and shortly after the fall of the *kapu* system. Taken together, these works reflect an era of great curiosity about the world and its inhabitants, and in their time popularized Hawai'i for audiences well beyond its shores.

Artist: John Webber (British, 1752–1793)

Engravers: S. Niddiman & J. Hall

*An Offering before CAPTAIN COOK, in the
SANDWICH ISLANDS*

Engraving

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of Anna Rice Cooke,
1927 (5734)

Artist: John Webber (British, 1752–1793)

Engraver: T. Cook

A Man of the Sandwich Islands, in a Mask,
Plate 66 in *Cook's Atlas*

Engraving

Honolulu Museum of Art, Purchase, 1927 (5876)

Louis Choris (Russian, 1795–1828)

(a) Women of the Sandwich Islands (b) Woman of the Sandwich Islands (c) Men of the Sandwich Islands Dancing, 1816

Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of the Honolulu Art Society, 1944 (12155a)

Louis Choris (Russian, 1795–1828)

Un Temple sur l'Île d'Ovayhi (Îles Sandwich),
c. 1816-17

Wash drawing with ink and graphite

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of the Honolulu Art Society, 1944 (12159)

Born in Russia to German parents, Louis Choris was the official artist on the Russian mission to circumnavigate the globe, led by Captain Otto von Kotzebue from 1815 to 1818. In 1816 and 1817, the expedition landed in Hawai'i, stopping at Kamakahonu on the Island of Hawai'i, home to Kamehameha I during the last years of his life. With Kamehameha's death in 1919 the *kapu* (prohibition) system that had guided Hawaiian spirituality went into decline. Choris's sketches are the only known visual record of Hawai'i's indigenous religion.

This drawing depicts the *heiau* (temple) that was built on a point at the western end of Kamakahonu. At the top of the complex is the temple house—the site's most imposing structure; in front of it, 'aumakua (ancestral gods) stand sentinel. Beyond the heiau are two guardian figures, arms upraised, and two small thatch houses, also part of the royal complex.

Louis Choris (Russian, 1795–1828)

Port d' Hanarourou sur l'île de Vahou (Iles Sandwich), 1816

Watercolor and graphite on paper (with sgraffito to create highlights)

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of the Honolulu Art Society, 1944 (12161)

Jacques Etienne Victor Arago (French,
1790–1855)

*The Baptism of the Prime Minister of the King of
the Sandwich Islands, 1819*

Pen, watercolor, and graphite

Honolulu Museum of Art, Purchase, 1992 (21487)

The *Uranie*, a French corvette commanded by Captain Louis de Freycinet, arrived off the coast of Hawai'i in 1819 as part of a scientific circumnavigation of the globe. Jacques Arago, the official artist on board, together with Alphonse Pellion and Adrien Taunay the Younger, were tasked with documenting the flora, fauna, people, and places that they saw.

While the *Uranie* was in Hawaiian waters, Kalanimoku, high chief of the Island of Hawai'i, was baptized in a shipboard ceremony, an event documented by this watercolor. At the center of the composition the chief stands, dressed in red, as Abbé de Quelen prepares to administer the sacrament. King Kamehameha II, his wives, and members of his court are all in attendance. One witness to the event wrote, "The quarter deck was decorated with flags, and the whole deck was covered with rugs for the seating of all these fine people; the altar had been put up near the poop."

Jacques Etienne Victor Arago (French,
1790–1855)

*Oahu, 1819–Dance of the natives of
the Sandwich Islands, 1819*

Pen and graphite on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Purchase, 1992 (21488)

Adrien Taunay (French, 1803–1828)

○ *Governor Cox of Maui*, 1819

Pen, watercolor, and graphite on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Purchase, 1992 (21490)

Adrien Taunay the Younger, junior draftsman on the *Uranie* under the command of Freycinet, produced drawings of natural history specimens and portraits during the voyage. Taunay rendered a likeness of Ke'eaumoku (also known by Hawaiians as Kahekili or by foreigners as George Cox), who, of chiefly status and Hawai'i's governor of Maui, was serving as an attendant at the baptism of High Chief Kalanimoku. In this compelling likeness, Ke'eaumoku stands on deck wearing a high-crowned Manila straw hat and a length of Western floral-patterned fabric wrapped around his figure. In his hand is Kalanimoku's pipe (smoking tobacco was a newly popular activity enjoyed by the chiefs), his responsibility being to keep it lit. Appointed by Kamehameha, Ke'eaumoku remained governor of Maui until his death in 1823.

Jacques Etienne Victor Arago (French,
1790–1855)

Ooro, Principal Officer of Kamehameha, 1819

Pen, ink, and ink wash over graphite on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of Frances Damon Holt
and in memory of John Dominis Holt, 1995 (25702)

Arago recorded his observations of the Hawaiian people, their mannerisms, and their customs in numerous portraits and genre scenes, including this likeness of an officer of Liholiho, son and heir of Kamehameha I. Clad in a blend of pre-contact attire and Western adornments, Ooro confronts the viewer with confidence. While his long feather cape and the topknot in his hair are traditionally Hawaiian, the sword he brandishes is of European origin and his tattoos incorporate Western motifs: on his arm is an inscription in English, "Tamaahmah died May 8, 1819"—a reference to the recent death of Kamehameha I—and the pattern across his torso suggests the cut of a vest with ornamental chain swags.

Jacques Etienne Victor Arago (French,
1790–1855)

*Hawai'i, 1819–The death penalty of
public execution by clubbing, 1819*

Graphite, pen, ink and grey wash on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of Frances Damon Holt
and in memory of John Dominis Holt, 1995 (25707)

Jacques Etienne Victor Arago (French,
1790–1855)

*The Way of Strangling the Guilty in the
Sandwich Islands*, 1819

Graphite, pen, ink, and grey wash on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of Frances Damon Holt
and in memory of John Dominis Holt, 1995 (25708)

Alphonse Pellion (French, active 1816–1820)

Studies of three wood carved images from a he'iau, one also shown in reverse, ca. 1819

Pencil

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of Frances Damon Holt and in memory of John Dominis Holt, 1995 (25710)

Little is known about Alphonse Pellion other than that he was a member of Freycinet's crew on the *Uranie*. A draftsman, he recorded Hawai'i's particularities, including this detailed study of several carved wooden deity figures, perhaps *'aumakua* (ancestral gods), that he observed at a *heiau*. With skill and exacting precision, Pellion utilized the sharp tip of his pencil to define the details of the figures' faces and head coverings, as well as to suggest with subtle shading their mass, volume, and most likely monumental proportions. Carved figures such as these would have stood sentinel at the thatched temple house at the heiau's summit. Today, such figures are rare since they (and the heiau that housed them) were ordered destroyed when the *kapu*, or prohibition, system was lifted following the death of Kamehameha I in 1819.

John Webber (British, 1752–1793)

A Native of the Island of Mangea (A Native of Atooi), Waimea, Kauai, Hawaiian Islands, January 1778, 1778

Graphite and sepia wash on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Partial purchase and partial gift of First Hawaiian Foundation, 2003 (26893)

John Webber (British, 1752–1793)

A Native of Atowi Sandwich Islands (A Native of Atooi), Waimea, Kauai, Hawaiian Islands, January 1778, 1778

Crayon, pen, graphite and sepia wash on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Partial Gift of Frances Damon Holt in memory of John Dominis Holt, partial purchase, 2001 (26894)

Artist: John Webber (British, 1752–1793)

Engraver: C. Grignion

*A CANOE of the SANDWICH ISLANDS, the
ROWERS MASKED, 1784*

Engraving

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Richard A. Cooke,
1941 (11815.51)

Artist: John Webber (British, 1752–1793)

Engraver: C. Grignion

*A MAN of the SANDWICH ISLANDS,
DANCING, 1784*

Engraving

Honolulu Museum of Art, Purchase, 1995 (26039)

Louis Choris (Russian, 1795–1828)

○ *Kamehameha I (Tammeamea)*, 1816

Pen and ink, ink wash, and watercolor on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Purchase, 2005 (28203)

○
J. K. Sherwin (British, 1751–1790)

A YOUNG WOMAN of the SANDWICH ISLANDS, 1784

Engraving

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Richard A. Cooke, 1941 (11815.49)

○

J. K. Sherwin (British. 1751–1790)

*A MAN of the SANDWICH ISLANDS, with his
HELMET, 1784*

Engraving

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Richard A. Cooke,
1941 (11815.50)

Louis Choris (Russian, 1795–1828)

*(a) Interior of the House of a Chief of the
Sandwich Islands (b) Kamehameha, King of the
Sandwich Islands, 1816*

Watercolor with opaque white heightening

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of the Honolulu Art
Society, 1944 (12162ab)

Adrien Taunay (French, 1803–1828)

Hawaiian Lobster, 1819

Watercolor on paper

Honolulu Museum of Art, Purchase, 1992 (23751)

Artists who accompanied the 18th- and 19th-century scientific expeditions were as concerned with the documentation of flora and fauna as they were with the people and places that they saw. In a departure from the many genre scenes and portraits from the Freycinet expedition, delicate watercolor drawing documents, with careful attention to detail, the structure and coloring of a Hawaiian lobster.

John Webber (British, 1752–1793)

View of Otapia Bay in Otaheite, 1787

Oil on canvas

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. Richard A. Cooke and Mr. Theodore A. Cooke, 1935 (4268)

The painter John Webber traveled with Captain James Cook's third and final voyage, from 1776 to 1780. As the expedition's official artist, he captured its discoveries in the academic manner in which he had been trained. With Cook, Webber traveled throughout the Pacific, stopping in New Zealand, Tonga, North America, and Tahiti. In 1778, Cook's vessels landed in the Sandwich Islands (now Hawai'i), stopping first on Kauai and ultimately on the Island of Hawaii, where Webber documented Cook's encounters with and eventual death at the hands of the island inhabitants.

In Tahiti, Webber made preliminary sketches for paintings such as this one. With its figures draped in white cavorting in Otapia Bay, this view—while not of Hawai'i—is typical of the extravagant landscape scenes created by Webber to romanticize the tropics as an idyllic Arcadian realm.

Louis Choris (Russian, 1795–1828)

(a) *Un Temple dans les Iles Sandwich (Temple in the Sandwich Islands)* (b) *Femmes des Iles Sandwich (Women of the Sandwich Islands)*, 1816–17

Watercolor with ink and opaque white highlights

Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of the Honolulu Art Society, 1944 (12160ab)