

Theodore Wores (American, 1859–1939)

The Lei Maker, 1901

Oil on canvas

Gift of Drs. Ben and A. Jess Shenson, 1986 (5490.1)

San Francisco painter Theodore Wores, is known for portraits, genre scenes, subjects, and landscapes drawn from inspired by his native city's Chinatown and during his travels in Japan., was resident He lived in Honolulu during 1901 and 1902, and. Like

other visiting artists, he was attracted to the beauty of Hawai'i's people and landscapes and rendered numerous Hawai'i subjects, *The Lei Maker*. Undoubtedly his Wores's best-known Hawai'i picture, *The Lei Seller* depicts a young woman dressed in a bright orange-red *holokū* with a *lei haku* (head lei) of matching colorful blossoms and green maile leaves on her head, and a maile lei around her neck. She sits on a woven mat and, pausing meditatively, interrupted to meet our gaze, as she strings a third lei with the delicate blossoms of the orange *'ilima* that lie scattered at her side. Engaging, appealing, and sweetly poignant, and completely romanticized, this painting work has come to embody the popular perception of "Old Hawai'i."



Left: "The Lei Maker," Theodore Wores' most famed and admired Hawaii painting, now has a permanent home at the Honolulu Academy of Arts.

Below: While working on the painting, the artist photographed the model, Lizzie Victor, in his studio.



Opposite page: "Waiialua" is a scenic rural landscape of an area Wores was fond of painting.

An Artist-Adventurer in turn-of-the-century Hawaii

Theodore Wores, a widely traveled and widely acclaimed painter, captured on canvas the beauty and charm of the Islands in the early 1900s

By Pat Pitzer

AN ARTIST WITH THE instincts of an explorer, Theodore Wores had a lifelong interest in recording in his paintings the people, customs and scenes of other cultures. His artistic quest for colorful, exotic subjects led him to paint his native San Francisco's Chinatown, then Japan, Hawaii, Samoa and Spain.

By the time he came to Hawaii in 1901, he was already famous, having earned international acclaim for his Japanese paintings.

The artist stopped briefly in Honolulu in 1892 on his way to

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see Encounters with Paradise
p. 224

Theodore Wores



This much-admired oil painting *The Lei Maker* by Theodore Wores is now on view in gallery 25, a promised gift of Drs. A. Jess and Ben Shenson

"The Lei Maker" Comes to the Academy

The well-known oil painting *The Lei Maker*, Honolulu, 1902, by Theodore Wores (1858-1939) has found its new home in the Hawaiian collection of the Honolulu Academy of Arts. The popular painting, which has inspired songs and hula by Napua Stephens and Irmgaard Aluli, is a promised gift of Drs. A. Jess and Ben Shenson of San Francisco and will be on view in the Hawaiian section of the gallery of the arts of the Pacific, Americas, and Africa from October 23.

Most recently *The Lei Maker* and several other canvases painted by Wores while in Hawaii have been part of the Wores retrospective exhibition of 87 paintings, which opened in Tokyo on May 9 and subsequently traveled to Kyoto and Yokohama. Thirty-eight of the Wores paintings done in Japan were on exhibit in the Academy's FOCUS Gallery in May

1985. Prior to the Japan tour *The Lei Maker* was part of *Hawai'i: The Royal Isles*, an exhibition that toured the United States and has been back at the Bishop Museum since December 1982. The Shensons, who describe the painting, in their words, as "representing the epitome of old Hawaii," have also provided a generous donation to provide for the installation of this special work.

In conjunction with the installation of the painting, a documentary film *Visual Pioneers of the 19th Century: The World of Theodore Wores* will be shown on Sunday, October 19, at 2 p.m. Admission is free.

ART

by Jean Charlot

D-26 Honolulu Star-Bulletin

Thurs., April 29, 1971



At the East-West Center, on the second floor of Jefferson Hall, the works of Theodore Wores are on exhibition until May 9. Roughly covering a span of 20 years, 1890-1910, the collection of paintings was lovingly gathered by two brothers, Ben and A. Jess Shenson, both doctors from San Francisco.

To their collection have been added pictures owned in our Islands, mostly portraits, done during one of Wore's stays in a Hawaii that, alas, with hindsight, we may now, characterize as the pre-highrise Hawaii. His widow, Caroline Bauer Wores, came to Hawaii to be with us for the inauguration.

Art means many things to many men. Its accepted meaning when these works were painted at the threshold of our century was vastly different from meanings found fashionable today.

One imagines the modern artist as engaged in esoteric

pursuits. It is believed that he dives deep into self to surface with subconscious images, dark trophies that he will clothe with form and color.

These safaris into the subconscious were not always synonymous with art. Only recently, in a post-Freudian world, has the definition acquired currency. Undoubtedly, artists who lived in other centuries felt inner stirrings that spurred at times their craft. They failed to boast about it.

IN MY understanding of the role of art, I rather side with the past. I wholeheartedly doff my beret to these colleagues who thought of themselves primarily as artisans.

I feel a special fondness for the itinerant portrait painter of Colonial America. He occupied his winters painting on canvas headless busts, male and female, with

hands holding suggestive accessories—for the man, a gold-headed cane or a book of accounts, for the lady, a Bible or a rose.

Come spring, the jobber packed his stock in trade and drove from townlet to townlet industriously fitting individual heads to the vacant shoulders—the heads of citizens solid enough to pay cash for being thus ushered into timelessness.

There were other ways in which the artist could lawfully cater to the needs of the nonartist. The townsman longed for the peace of the countryside. An image of cattle grazing filled his pastoral need.

Suppressed romantics wished for castles in Spain. Painted vistas of exotic lands peopled by innocent savages help them firm the vagueness of their dream.

To speak of art as a merchandise prefabricated to fit a need seems to some of us

today an irreverent paradox. And yet great art often has come into being sprung from such simple premises. Such a primitive as Douanier Rousseau and such a sophisticated as Paul Gauguin sought unabashedly the picturesque and, in so doing, shook to the roots our preconceptions concerning art.

As did Gauguin, as did Rousseau, Theodore Wores searched a lifetime for strange sights in strange lands. He was among the first Western artists to work in Japan, to observe in situ its sights. Already a knowledge of this closed land had reached European artists. It was a very limited one.

As the story goes, Manet and Monet discovered at their grocer that cracked seeds or an equivalent were wrapped in the frail sheets of ukiyo-e prints. Carefully smoothing out the wrappers they delightedly discovered a Japan of cursive brush-lines and watercolor tints, a dream Japan that perhaps never was.

Knowing much more now than was known then about the Orient, it is easy for us to smile our wisdom when looking at the Japan of Manet and Van Gogh. Whistler also was well served in his art by incomplete knowledge when, in his Nocturnes, he arched over the Thames what Japanese bridges he had discovered on fans and screens.

PERHAPS ALONE at the time, Wores squarely faced the reality of a factual Japan. He could not accept, through added knowledge, the shorthand versions proposed by Impressionists.

Yet Japan freed him from the yoke of sheer realism. Cherry blossoms and plum blossoms taught his brush their own version of a pointillism that, at the same time, Seurat had launched in the abstract, basing his discovery on a marriage between art and optics.

In this show, pictures on Hawaiian subjects dating from the first decade of our century hold for us—naturally—an additional interest.



LIZZIE

WHO IN HAWAII MIGHT KNOW OF THE BEAUTIFUL GIRL WHO GRACES OUR COVER? AND HOW MANY KNOW OF THEODORE WORES WHO PAINTED HER?

By Laurie Hover

THE NAMES OF THE artists who, over the years, have recorded the developing Hawaiian scene in paint and charcoal are familiar to all. Often their subject matter is equally well known.

The "Christmas cover" on this month's magazine is the painting of a girl named Lizzie Victor and where do you suppose she is today? Deceased? A very old *tutu*? Are her children and grandchildren in our midst, able to

step forth and account for her?

And how many people in Hawaii if—you asked them — could identify



the name Theodore Wores? He is the artist who captured *The Lei Maker* (Lizzie) on canvas while passing through Honolulu sometime around the turn of the century. He also, reportedly, did a portrait of Sanford B. Dole and a painting of Diamond Head in the moonlight but where these are today is a mystery.

The original painting of Lizzie now hangs in the private collection of Dr. A. Jess Shenson and Dr. Ben Shenson of San Francisco. The Shensons are among Wores' most devoted followers and are constantly in quest of more of his work.

There has been an upsurge of in-

terest in Wores of late due, in part, to the recent publication of a memoir of his life by Lewis Ferbraché and a concurrent traveling exhibition of his work through Northern California.

Once again the vital entity of this adventurous man emerges from the obscurity of time.

He was the son of an emigrant family of Hungarian political refugees, who went to San Francisco in 1852. Encouraged by his family, his youthful predilection for painting flourishing in the bustling, culture-thirsty "Paris of the West," he, at the precocious age of 16—and with the blessings of his teachers at the San Francisco Art Association — set off for the august Munich Art Academy.

Wores studied seven years with the German masters and a noted American, Frank Duveneck. Among the vanguard of young artists and intellectuals he came to know in Europe was the fascinating expatriate, James McNeill Whistler, who proved a useful friend in the formative years of his career.

Upon his return to the U.S., the "story telling quality" of Wores' work won him considerable acclaim. His scenes of San Francisco's Chinatown were especially in demand. It's doubtful that any other artist of the period was as well received with as much adulation and publicity as this quiet, retiring, rather formal young man.

In 1881 he was elected a member of the select Bohemian Club and was commissioned to paint the portrait of

the international celebrity, Oscar Wilde.

Wores was probably the first of our American artists to "go on location" when, in 1885, he sailed for Japan—still a mysterious, feudal country just beginning to recognize the Western world.

There he lived as a Japanese,

Theodore Wores in 1875.





Steep Lane in Japan.



San Francisco Chinatown.

painted the charm and character of their picturesque life and made innumerable friends for America.

Repeated visits to the Far East took him through Honolulu. Completely captivated by the Islands he determined to "immortalize the vanishing spirit of Old Hawaii".

The intensity of Hawaii's moonlight he found unrivaled. "In Northern climes," he said, "moonlight effects are almost black and white, while here every color holds true, although in a submerged key.

"One of his paintings, entitled *Diamond Head by Moonlight*, was hailed as an absolute masterpiece. Unfortunately, it seems to have vanished without trace.

He regretted the "modernization" of Honolulu. A quote from his "Farewell Views on Honolulu" from the *Hawaiian Star*, September 3, 1902, is only too updated: "While Mr. Wores is an enthusiastic admirer of Hawaii and will ardently declaim its beauties, he deplores constantly what he considers the near-sighted policy of the departments in destroying the imme-

diat charms of Honolulu and its environs."

Sounds familiar? Read on:

"While the tourists who come here for the specific purpose of staying in the Islands will in due time see all their beauties, the tourist passing through who spends a few hours ashore and takes a drive to Waikiki or elsewhere — and who might be expected to return here at some leisure day—sees nothing to tempt him. Honolulu has the appearance of a third rate American city instead of the quaint charm of a semi-tropical town. The road to the Pali and Nuuanu Avenue presents the only drive that still retains individual and characteristic charm. The drives near the city should be beautiful—not laid out as if they were military highways."

In 1910 Theodore Wores married Carolyn Bauer in San Francisco and returned to Honolulu with his bride. The newlyweds were much fêted and parties for them were hosted by the Dillinghams, the Doles and other Island families. On this visit Theodore was commissioned to paint the por-

trait of Governor Frear as well as a series of portraits of the chief justices of the Territorial Supreme Court.

At that time Wores was dean of the faculty of the Hopkins Art School which was later to become the San Francisco Institute of Art.

In the fall of 1915, Wores and Carolyn set off "on location" to paint the Indians of British Columbia and New Mexico, some of his finest contributions to the world of history as well as art. This odyssey lasted three years.

Back home once more, they gypsied on local sketching tours, concentrating on California's wild flowers.

In his later years, he and Carolyn opened their own art gallery in an abandoned chapel in the quaint foothill town of Saratoga, where his days were spent recording the Springtime glory of the almond, cherry and peach orchards, against the smoky blue of the California hills.

Until his death, Theodore Wores was an artist in search of the picturesque.

LETTERS



WHO WAS LIZZIE?

On the cover of your December issue is a picture of a painting of a lovely Hawaiian girl whom you identify as Lizzie Victor. In the article about the picture and its artist you ask anyone who can identify the subject to please contact you.

I think the girl on the cover is the dear Mrs. Joe Victor whom my family knew very well for many years. Mother and she were particularly good friends. Mrs. Victor used to come to Halekulani on steamer days during the 1930s. We would set up a card table for her in a shady spot and there she would sell her fragrant plumeria, tuberose and other flower leis to guests who wanted to bedeck departing guests with whom they had become acquainted at Halekulani.

Often various Halekulani employees would also buy her leis, giving a real Hawaiian Aloha to the departing guests.

I have a very special personal reason to remember Mrs. Victor. When in 1934 I decided to run for our local House of Representatives, Mrs. Victor took me in hand to advise me how to go about getting the Hawaiian vote. She of course was very well acquainted in all of the areas where there was a large Hawaiian population, especially Papakolea and Kakaako.

One thing Mrs. Victor felt I should do was give a short talk in Hawaiian at the rallies before going into my other speech. She wrote one for me and in a couple of days, with her help, I had it down pat. She felt that my pronunciation was very good. At a big rally in Kakaako, where Sam King's father, who was a delegate to Congress, had already given his talk, mostly in Hawaiian, I had a most embarrassing experience. Sadly, few of us here had ever had the opportunity to learn to speak Hawaiian. At rallies we always were greeted with leis by our various friends and "backers" on arrival at the park. It was all very colorful and each major candidate would have his group of musicians along to sing and play for him. Mrs. Victor always had a lovely young Hawaiian girl come up on the platform and present all with a lei and a kiss — no doubt as she had herself done in years gone by when she was the beautiful young matron shown on your cover.

Well, when I got down off the stand after my little spiel that evening, a number of older Hawaiians came up to me almost with tears in their eyes. They spoke to me in Hawaiian but, to my great embarrassment, I had to reply in English. I felt like an awful phony! After that I gave my pitch for "tax exemption on land planted to taro, a son of the soil born in Hawaii Nei at Haleiwa, etc." — strictly in English.

So you can see that dear Mrs. Victor was

for a number of years very much a part of my "political life." Without her help I doubt very much whether I would have been nominated on the Republican ticket in that hard fought primary. Maybe you would like to hear more about that some other time.

RICHARD (KINGIE) KIMBALL

I knew Lizzie Victor when she was only 20 and an operator for Hawaiian Telephone Company. She never married but adopted two girls and one boy who were part Hawaiian and part *haole*. She educated them in public schools and then moved to Hilo where she became a sampan bus driver.

She and her mother, Mrs. O. T. Shipman, lived together and Lizzie was a wonderful hostess. Her Hawaiian food was excellent and everyone enjoyed her parties. Her children now live on the Mainland. Lizzie was a very nice woman. She died in 1945.

AMELIA A. GUERRERO
(Age 85)

MORE ON WORES

I have done additional research since writing the article about Theodore Wores which appeared in your December issue. The man who painted the lovely likeness of Lizzie Victor did, indeed, capture the faces of other persons in Honolulu.

Among them were Mrs. B. F. Dillingham, whose portrait hangs at the Daughters of Hawaii pavilion. Others were E. Faxon Bishop and Governor Sanford Dole whose likeness can be viewed in the cardroom at the Pacific Club. Among prominent Island women were Mrs. John Waterhouse, Mrs. Edward Duisenberg (Marion Roth), Mrs. Joseph Carter and Mrs. Jan Jabulka, recently deceased.

Wouldn't it be interesting if a local gallery assembled the work of this distinguished artist for a showing?

Laurie Hoover

NOISE POLLUTION

Your December cover is beautiful. How unfortunate that you did not use as good judgement in selecting the article called *I'm Dreaming of a Quiet Christmas* which is a cruel insult to all the Island groups who so ably entertain us with their lovely Hawaiian songs and dances. I should think that an apology is due.

MRS. L. BEAUFRERE

Your article about Hawaiian minstrels is a disgrace. One of the nicest things about dining in our city's clubs are the serenaders. It is obvious that Jim Dandy — whoever he is — is a *kamaaina*-hater.

KAMAAINA

Cheers for your article about noisy music with dinner. Now that you point it out, I think these loud singers and strummers have caused me more discomfort than the jets and Hondas that are most often mentioned when noise pollution is being discussed.

DONALD EMERSON