

Running rampant through nature

Keya Keita

THE GARDEN ISLAND

Artist and Anahola resident, Mac James wakes every morning with a humble gratitude for the natural beauty of Kaua'i.

A circuitous path led James through the world of art, entertainment, the urban machine and commerce of smog before arriving in Hawai'i.

James spent his childhood playing in the tall grasses of Florida's Gulf Coast but memories of sand and sun soon faded as his work as an illustrator was maximized by the 1970s rock 'n' roll industry of Los Angeles.

He drew and designed hundreds of album covers for mega-music-stars such as Michael Jackson and Fleetwood Mac. "That was before computers, before cell phones," James says. "You couldn't just feed an image into a computer and have it fixed for you. I had to draw them. Each and every one."

The music industry offered shimmers of excitement in exchange for the prolific era in James' work but there was a more authentic aspiration that couldn't be ignored.

"In 1985 I just put it all down and decided it was time to be-

come a fine artist. I took a year to paint and from that point on, I never looked back." In response to James' decisive action in leaving the lucrative and high-profile music business, he was able to gain considerable support from the elusive gallery community.

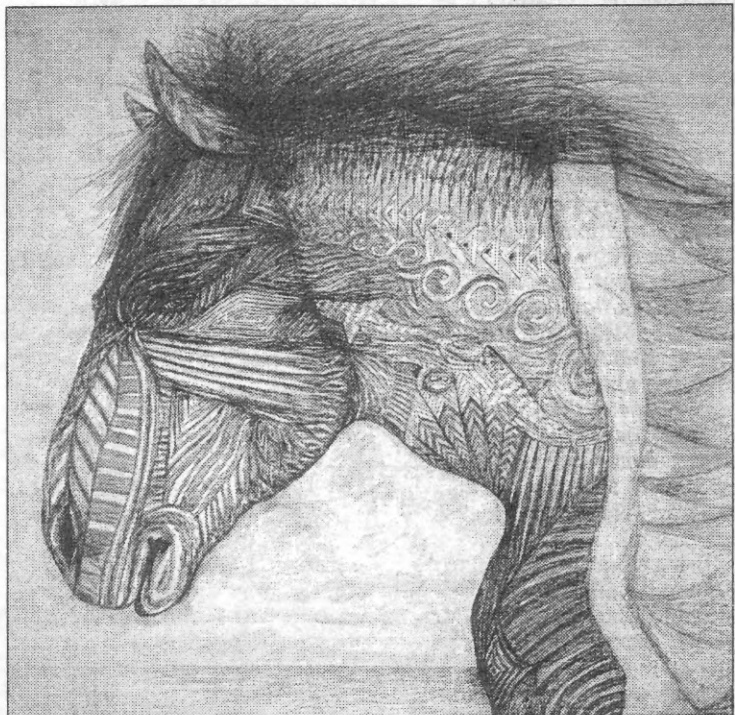
After a tenure in New York City of producing and showing new works, renowned art dealer Rosamund Felsen of Santa Monica, Calif., offered to represent James and include his work in several shows.

Throughout the 1990's, James worked in the urban environment where pop culture and "the urban crawl" informed his canvas with ironic humor.

Yet while the metropolis marched on around him, the nature of his youth began to resurface, and quite abruptly after a short visit to Kaua'i with family, he untied the anchor and arrived on-island, rich with liberation and relief.

"I came with nothing, only a knowledge that I needed to be here." James says. "Even if I sat in my car on some beach, I knew it was the right thing and that something would eventu-

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Mac James / Contributed by the artist

'Kane of Kaua'i' — oil and graphite on canvas, 49.5-by-50 inches; 2006, by artist Mac James.

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ally happen. You're pretty invincible when you finally just cut loose."

Appreciative of all the years that preceded his move to the island, he has absolutely no desire to return to "that mad, mad city."

"As a painter, nature and place and sometimes the collision of both, appear to be a distinct characteristic of my work."

Inspired and influenced by his immediate environment, James' life in Kaua'i is a primary focus in his current art.

Working for Silver Falls Ranch as a horse wrangler and emergency equine assistant has ushered in a wealth of animal imagery as subject matter.

The diversity of life experience echo is James' process — while raw nature serve as content and subject, the form is infused with a contemporary structure.

This combination, James

says, "allows nature to run rampant through my work on its own."

James appreciates how animals are honored members of the Hawaiian family.

Surrounded by cats, dogs, birds and the magnificent horse, Kane, whom he cares for at Silver Falls, add

up to his assertion that "This is a real wonderful existence." Having re-

turned to Los Angeles only once in four years magnified his contentment of leaving the city for brighter days. "I got out."

James feels he has gone full circle from his childhood in Florida, through the urban explosion of Los Angeles and New York, to arrive back in the green heaven of nature's wonder. "Kauai is nature and place combined to convey sheer amazement in seven million humbling years of evolu-

tion in the most iconic sense of self-preservation as its own self and island world."

The young and blossoming art community of Hanapepe is something James is very proud to be witnessing. "It feels like the beginning of Soho or Venice."

Meet the artist

At the Friday Night Art Walk in Hanapepe on Kona Road from 6-9 p.m. at TimeSpace Gallery. The show runs tonight through March 23.

Acknowledging the amazing pool of talent on this island, James says, "There are so many incredible artists here,

they need to have an outlet, they need to show their work." Having been part of the era of the burgeoning Basquiat of Soho and the explosive transformation of Bergamot Station in Santa Monica, James feels as though he is, again, at the moment of pollination in a small-town art scene that has national potential.

James' first show on Kaua'i opens Friday at Hanapepe's TimeSpace Gallery, which is

"dedicated to providing space for artists to showcase their talent and vision," says Antonio Arellanes, curator and owner of the gallery.

The Mac James exhibit kicks off a season of single-artist shows at the gallery. Arellanes says of James, "I think his work is terrific. The new works are really wonderful and I am so happy to welcome him to the gallery space."

While some see leaving the hyped-out Angeleno art scene as an admission of failure or resignation, James' feels the absolute opposite. It has been an evolution in not only his work but also in his life — from sharks to shells, palms to ponies — James responds to his environment by honoring it through the lens of his own unique vision.

To see more of James' current work, visit the artist's website: www.macjames-onkauai.com

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