

STANLEY STUBENBERG ART



Stanley Stubenberg's passion for art and design began in childhood on the island of Oahu, Hawaii where he would draw for hours on end quite funny and sophisticated cartoons. After graduating from the Art Center in Los Angeles, he returned to Hawaii and began developing a unique style that delightfully let us see the diversity and fun-loving spirit of Hawaii in the early 1950's.

Stanly soon became quite sought after by hotels and restaurants to design brochures and menus with his unique perspective of the islands and its people. In 1955, at the age of 30, his true artistic genius came to the fore when he designed 56 stunning pictures in the book Hawaiian Times. Authored by Genie Pitchford the text and pictures gave life to dozens of uniquely special Hawaiian traditions, culture,

accomplishments, foibles, perplexities, attitudes, and history that could only have emerged through a polyglot of peoples from all corners of the globe.

Hawaii at that time was still an exotic and adventurous destination for visitors that became synonymous with paradise. Indeed, Hawaii was establishing an international identity as one of the most friendly and welcoming places on the planet with its spirit of Aloha, a word that could mean hello, farewell, and I love you. And Stanley was right in the middle of that golden age.

Drawing on inspiration from many creative artists of the era, particularly Juan Miro and Saul Steinberg, Stanley incorporated the sharp, angular lines that accentuated character and brought out the more humorous aspects of the human condition. But he added clean oval shapes to his designs that softened and lent a distinctive Hawaiian humanity to his subjects that he knew so well. Indeed, his art became a Hawaiian style all its own.

Stanley's art has sometimes been categorized as Tiki Art, and while there were some similarities, it is in fact far more sophisticated and nuanced. Whereas Tiki Art would reflect, exploit, and simplify Polynesian art in an effort to give it some exotic quality that could be mass marketed, Stanley took it to a higher level by truly representing and defining contemporary culture of 1950's Hawaii. He gave it the depth and meaning it deserved, along with whimsy and cleverness.

Stanley's path would take him to New York City, where he was one of three enormously talented graphic designers for **NBC**. Although New York gave him the opportunity to see and experience a broad array of art and design, his true spiritual and artistic home was always in tropical islands. After 6 years in New York, he would move to St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands that would ultimately be his home for the next 35 years.

Family members and old friends have often speculated why he went there after New York and not back to Hawaii. The best we can come up with is that St. Croix was a kind of "Old Hawaii" before all the big development ushered in a new age, much different than the Hawaii he knew. That throwback to a

less complex and more connected time is where the heart of his art lies. St. Croix is where he drew inspiration in the second half of his life observing and experiencing a world not yet caught up in the frenzy of modern life. Just as in Hawaii, he listened to the street chatter of the ladies in the market place that wafted up to his loft above and admired the skills and talents of locals that made them strong and independent and beholden to none.

Not surprisingly, Stanley's artist eye would regularly critique the good and bad design of his surroundings. Of course, he would make it better, the way it should be -- artistic humanity that drew you in, that fostered gathering and mingling, where individual personalities came alive, boisterous and unguarded, and people had nothing but pure fun. Later, this would be called soul, and Stanley, far ahead of his time, intuitively knew what that meant and made it his life to draw and capture those aspects of life wherever he saw it. He knew that in time, much of that life that he lived and loved would be gone.

He died in September 2001 at age 74. Some of his ashes are scattered in ocean off St. Croix, fittingly from a simple West Indian sloop from another age that he so loved. The rest were put inside banana leaves by our cousin James Stubenberg and floated off a part of Oahu that never changed.

***The Buccaneer is proud to showcase Stubenberg's mural,
"Fighting Ships," in their Lounge.***