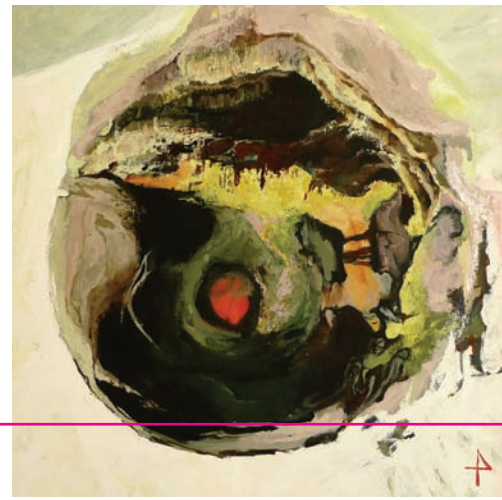
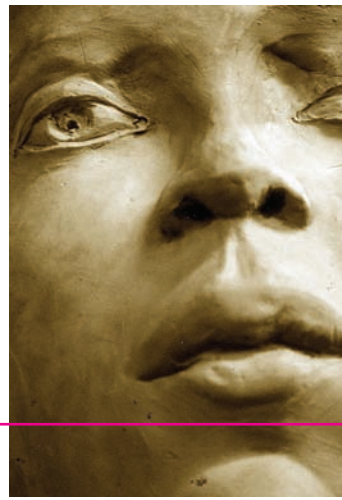




KAHALA


Life

KAHALA LIFE 1.1
THE KAHALA HOTEL & RESORT





“WHEN I LOOK AT A SATELLITE PHOTO, I FEEL AN INTENSE EXCITEMENT. ... BUT I’VE ALSO NOTICED IT IN MANY OTHER PEOPLE. AND I THINK IT MIGHT BE A MEMORY IN OUR GENES. IT MIGHT BE SOMETHING WE’VE SEEN BEFORE BECAUSE WE ARE ALL STAR-DUST, RIGHT?”

-BETTY MARTIN

Now living in East Honolulu, artist Betty Martin finds inspiration in Hawai‘i’s remarkable landscape

Betty Martin knew she was home the first time she stood on Hawaiian lava rock. “That was it,” she told me from her studio in Portlock. “I walked on the lava, and that was where I belonged.”

It turns out Martin’s journey toward that understanding covered a fair amount of the globe. Originally from France, she was raised in Paris and Copenhagen, but after beginning her career in Europe, the artist later moved to New York City, where she lived for two decades.

The scope of Martin’s work has also covered a great deal of ground, beginning with sculpture at a young age and transitioning toward painting and drawing during her Masters of

Fine arts degree studies at L’Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris. She also learned opera set design at that time and worked on a range of theater and opera productions, leading to jobs in the European film industry and later lucrative gigs painting sets for music videos shot in New York.

“I worked on videos for Janet Jackson, George Michael, Busta Rhymes, Wu-Tang Clan,” she explains, “Jennifer Lopez, R. Kelly and Biggie, who was great.”

While in New York, Martin also helped restore one of the city’s landmarks, recreating from scratch a sizeable sculpture of two angels that was originally installed atop Manhattan’s iconic Flatiron building in 1902.

Martin’s body of work runs the gamut, from recreating a sculpture for the Flatiron building in New York to set designs to her current paintings based on aerial photographs.

Left page: photos courtesy of Betty Martin



FINE PURSUITS



“The story is the originals fell on the sausage cart below [in the 1970s],” Martin says with a laugh. “But I think they were breaking apart, so the [superintendent] took them down, and now they’re in someone’s backyard—and I’m not the only one who thinks that.”

Martin won a design contest the building’s management held to replace the missing statue, but creating the 11-by-11-foot work, featuring angels weighing 1,600 pounds each, proved to be a tremendously arduous task. Martin figures the original was crafted by several men working over at least six months.

“I didn’t really know what I was getting into,” she remembers, noting that she worked on the project at night in a meatpacking warehouse regularly frequented by large New York City rats. “I did it by myself, with three tons of clay, in nine weeks, so basically it was a miracle.”

Martin’s first visit to Hawai‘i didn’t come until 2010, when a client, for whom she’d done a great deal of residential mural work in New York, asked that she travel to O‘ahu to do some painting on a new home in Honolulu.

During some downtime from that O‘ahu project, she traveled to the Big Island and encountered her first hardened Hawai‘i lava flow.

“I’ve always been crazy about volcanoes,” she tells me. “And I started my work about nature before I met Hawai‘i, [but] this place inspired me to paint and to become who I want to be in my paintings.”

One of those paintings, a vibrant, 7-by-5-foot favorite of Martin’s, is hanging on the wall beside us as we chat. Although at first glance it looks incredibly abstract, “Mauna Loa Mon Amore” is a remarkably faithful likeness of a Landsat photo-

graph taken of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa from space using a sensitive filter.

“It’s a heat filter that shows the warm ground in purple,” she says, pointing toward the two distinct violet sections of the painting, “so that’s understandable for Mauna Loa because it’s active, but what about Mauna Kea?”

About eight years ago, Martin began her “Pristine” project, a series of paintings that started out as works inspired by aerial photos of uninhabited natural landscapes but has since become more focused on earth imagery captured by satellites.

“When I look at a satellite photo, I feel an intense excitement,” she explains. “I’ve noticed that’s very powerful inside me, but I’ve also noticed it in many other people. And I think it might be a memory in our genes. It might be something we’ve seen before because we are all stardust, right?”

One of her latest from the series is “Beloved Hawai‘i”—a triptych inspired from a satellite image, a sonar of the Hawaiian Islands, which is currently on display at 87 Zero. I ask her how she decides which photos she’ll paint.

“I fall in love, an irresistible love,” she answers with a smile, adding that she does a great deal of research, often on scientific websites, to track each image down. “With this one, I researched and researched, and then I just couldn’t take my eyes off it.”

We discuss those researched photos again on the couch in her living room before I leave.

“My goal is not to reproduce the photo,” she says. “The photo is a very good witness of the beauty of nature herself. There’s no need to paint it. It’s there already. My goal is to express the awe that all this magnificence triggers in me.”

For more information on the artist, go to bettymartinworks.com

For the Hawai‘i resident, the islands’ beautiful and sometimes unusual topography serves as her muse for her vibrant paintings.

Olivier Koning photos.
Inset photos to the left of Martin
courtesy of Betty Martin

