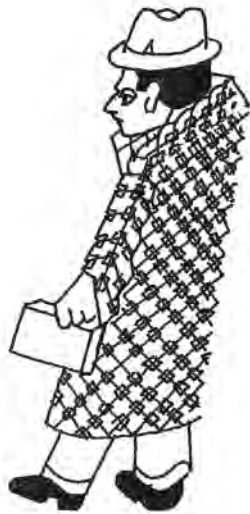


CHAPTER 15



ALOHA

Another series of talks came up: this time they were to be held at engineering faculties at various American university campuses, and my first speaking engagement was at UCLA. It was around the time that President Nixon announced that US troops would attack enemy locations in Cambodia. The hippy ‘flower power’ movement was in full swing and anti-war protests reached a hiatus in Kent State, with the deaths of students by gunfire from US auxiliary forces. The killing of students by the supposed forces of law and order took the atmosphere sky high.

I was due to speak at an engineering faculty, which was on the far side of the campus. I was wearing my trilby hat and my Gannex mac. The Gannex mac, worn famously by Harold Wilson, gave the impression that the wearer was a walking waffle. The slides and the projector I was using were carried in a large box by an unfortunate agent of the Concrete Society, responsible for arranging this series of talks.

We left the reception area to find that a line of policemen clad head to toe in riot gear, crash hats, batons, shields and so forth, stood between our armoured car and us. They were facing a group of students who were waiting across the road ready for battle. The students wore masks, covered their mouths with cloths, and had goggles to stop tear gas affecting them.

ALOHA

Parked at one end of the road was our car and to make sure he was aware we were about to cross the road I tapped one of the heavily armoured policemen on the shoulder – he was totally taken aback. Was it my accent, the politeness of my request for help, or the uncertainty caused by my peculiar dress? ‘Watch yourself over there!’ he said, pointing towards the student battle line.

I felt very vulnerable as we walked into ‘No Man’s Land’ under the hostile stare of the student body, and as soon as we reached our vehicle, we jumped in and sped off to the lecture venue. That evening, I was lying on my hotel bed resting when the phone rang and I heard the excited voice of my projector-carrier, shouting: ‘Turn on the TV – we’re on!’

I switched the television on and saw myself – a sinister figure clad in a Gannex mac and trilby hat. My projector-carrier was following me, carrying the large case, which might, under the circumstances, have held some sort of deadly weapon. The commentator was saying: ‘Obviously, these two are FBI...’ The following morning we were on the frontpage of the *Chronicle*: ‘FBI FIGHTS BACK!’

Because of the various TV interviews I’d done in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I got to know a few celebrities: for instance, Jeffrey Hayden and his wife, Eva Marie Saint, a beautiful actress who is possibly best known as the heroine in Hitchcock’s *North by North West* and from her performance in *Grand Prix* in 1966. Her husband did not like her doing more than one film per year, and when I met them, she had already done her quota in the acclaimed but rarely seen *Loving* with George Segal.

On one particular occasion, I was invited to Eva’s house in the hills for the weekend, and on the Saturday they threw a dinner party. Guests included the Austrian-born film director Otto Preminger, Efrem Zimbalist Jr from *77 Sunset Strip*, and an actress with fluffy blonde hair and a very generous mouth, who was in a well known soap of the day. The talk was lively and in order to bring me into the conversation, Eva asked me to describe a project I was working on at Clatterbridge Hospital in the UK.

In the cancer research department at Clatterbridge Hospital, there was a series of underground chambers containing enormous machines for treating tumours by radiation. The patient was placed on a trolley and wheeled along a slowly-descending corridor into a concrete room, within which was a vast set of science-fiction-like machinery. One of these machines straddled a fixed stretcher-like bed, onto which the patient was placed and secured. On my first viewing, I thought this looked more like some kind of electrically operated, torture apparatus than a cutting-edge healing machine.

I was asked to suggest a way to make these rooms appear a little less clinical and more sympathetic; not by the doctors I might add, but by the architects Gilling Dodd & Partners, who were designing a further six of these spaces. The patients spent a considerable time on their backs during their treatment. My idea was to cover the ceilings with patterns. These ceilings were incredibly thick and lined with protective lead screens. I would produce a pattern, which would be cast within the concrete for the ceiling and would look like butterfly wings. Texture would be added by creating high and low areas that would glow, when illuminated by a series of low voltage lamps

SELF PORTRAIT: THE EYES WITHIN



Clatterbridge – sculptured ceiling

hidden along a small projecting cornice. Gradated colour gels were set to each lamp, giving the impression of slowly fluttering wings when lit. I hoped it would go some way towards destroying the oppressive nature of this otherwise sinister concrete room.

I also wanted the patients to interact, to take their minds off what was happening to them, so I suggested they should have a polished wood control panel, from which they could change the colours and conjure up a number of effects. The colour range was intended to be therapeutic, using specific secondary and tertiary hues to offer a soft kaleidoscopic display over the bas-reliefs. Thinking about it now, I realise I might have made the gruesome experience worse for these unfortunate patients, who must have thought they were trapped in an appalling nightmare.

Whilst I was describing this project, the fluffy blonde kept lighting cigarette after cigarette and stubbing them out amongst the remains of her dinner. I admit the subject was not the best at a dinner party, but it was my hostess who had suggested it. What none of us realised was that this lady was suffering from terminal cancer. When I had finished, an almost imperceptible gloom descended over the table and shortly afterwards the party began to break up, and the fluffy blonde left, still smoking.

We stayed up for a bit, chatting over a nightcap. I happened to be sitting facing the large windows that opened out onto the patio and garden, and suddenly, I saw a man running from the shrubbery waving. I remarked on this to my hosts and they were galvanised into action upon spotting the fire.

‘My God, my God, get the hoses!’ They rushed into the garden, connecting hoses, finding buckets and anything that would contain water. The garden was alight and for the next six hours

ALOHA

we worked hard trying to put the fire out. Even the neighbours piled in to help. Fires in this area are incredibly dangerous. The canyons are notorious for it: some fires are started maliciously, others naturally, but once they begin, they are so aggressive they are almost impossible to kill.

My hosts were very fortunate: a neighbour had spotted a small glow and started to tackle it, although it had already spread under the shrubbery close to the ground. But thanks to the windless evening and the neighbours' help, there was no extensive damage. It was generally agreed that the fluffy blond started the fire when she inadvertently flicked a cigarette butt into the shrubbery on her way to her car.

Eva's husband moved from the house some months later – nothing to do with the fires, but to do with success. Written into his contract was a clause that should the whereabouts of his home become public knowledge, the studio would underwrite the costs of the move and any loss accrued on the property itself. Jeffrey Hayden produced TV programmes such as *77 Sunset Strip* – all of them were runaway successes, which meant a continuous stream of moves, because as soon as the public discovered his address, they would camp out on his lawn in the hope of spotting the stars.

Whilst I was tying up a few loose ends in San Francisco, I received another call from Tom Mellon's office, asking if I would contact a member of the board of supervisors who were in San Francisco for a few days and wanted to discuss a collaboration with the department of education in Honolulu, Hawaii. I went to his hotel and was greeted by a burly figure with a flat Polynesian nose and a very agreeable manner. He suggested we discussed the project further in Honolulu. 'Not half,' I thought, trying desperately not to appear too eager and carefully taking time to sip my coffee before accepting his offer.

Honolulu is some 3,000 thousand miles from San Francisco, and a different kind of world. In my ignorance, I had assumed that the famous holiday area was the largest area of activity on the island: in fact, it was the smallest and is confined to a very small stretch of coastline. By far the largest was the military and naval sector, followed closely by the American industrial estate – creating products destined for South East Asia, and not to forget, Del Monte, with its immense fruit growing and canning interests; I saw plenty of men in white linen suits, but never the man from Del Monte himself.

This diverse grouping demanded a complex infrastructure, in which the department of education and the perpetually feared parent-teachers association were important elements. Of course, I was unable to resist the invitation to Honolulu, and once again found myself addressing a gathering of parents and others on the merits of the London County Council.

Firstly, I proposed that I should work directly with the schools in the Honolulu area, and secondly, that I would encourage the pupils to produce sculpture or decorative design for their particular school. There was an underlying reason for this: Hawaii has a very transient North American population and the native Hawaiians at that time felt that the North Americans were almost using their country like a hotel, except with little profit to them. An example of this is the palace of the former king of Hawaii, which had been recycled to form the entrance to a vast hotel complex – the hotel buildings completely engulf the palace: a three-dimensional display of dominance.

SELF PORTRAIT: THE EYES WITHIN

The palace is white and covered in exquisite Polynesian carvings, contrasting against the natural lushly polished leaves and blossoms of Hawaii.

I wasn't convinced that they considered their English connections a good thing or not, but since the Hawaiian State flag carried a Union Jack and Captain Cook 'discovered' the islands, I hoped the good people of Honolulu would view me favourably – although I kept reminding myself what happened to Cook at the end of his expedition. Fees and accommodation were swiftly agreed, and I started work, beginning with a debate between the pupils on what they wanted to build. The first school decided to produce a stepping or climbing wall, which fronted onto the road, but would appear to be partially buried, like a ruined fort.

We created figures of different sizes, adding texture and decoration by inserting pieces of carved polystyrene into the mould, and incorporating assorted colours by painting the surfaces of each square-faced chunk with oxides ranging from deep green to pale red. Each chunk or pillar was set into the ground to make a giant causeway on which you could perch, stand or step from one to the other. The area was then planted with shrubs and trailing plants. I must say, it really did look good. The sun helped of course, making the whole sculpture look like a rediscovered temple in an exotic garden.

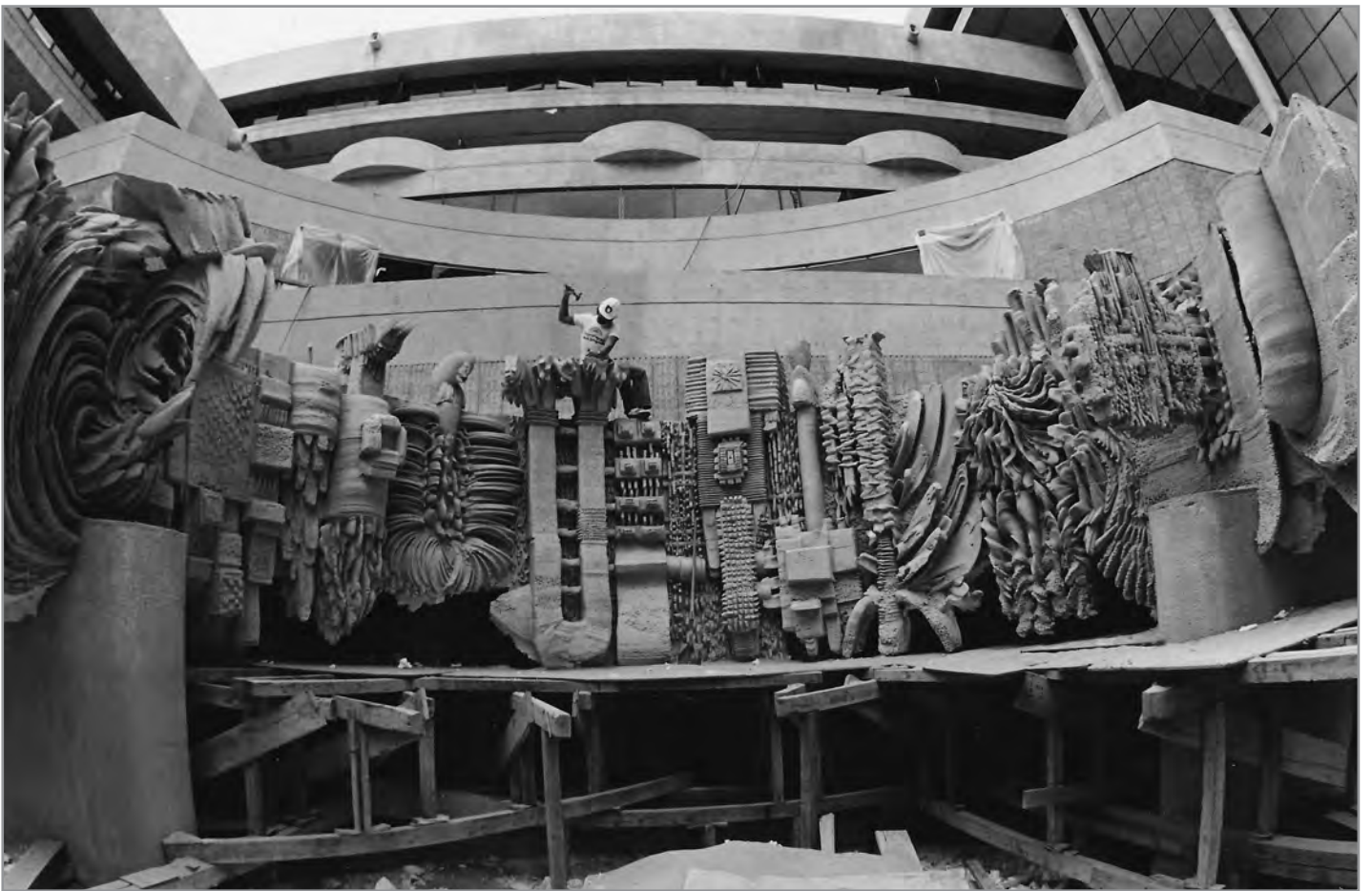
Another school wanted pictures on the ceilings, so I utilised the square cardboard inserts to Messers Westons' large biscuit tins and each child was given two 12-inch squares, along with powder colours in palettes of blue, yellow, red, black, and white. I demonstrated how to mix the colours to obtain secondary and tertiary shades, and asked each child to invent two flowers, each one big enough to completely cover a square of cardboard. When dry, we sealed the pictures with a water sealer, which dried fast in the sun, and then we gave the 'tiles' a coat of copal varnish, giving a slightly aged gloss appearance. We then covered the classroom ceilings and the ceilings in the corridors and entrance lobby. Everyone agreed that this blaze of colour and pattern resembled the old-style Hawaiian/Polynesian decoration in essence, but with a modern twist.

The parents were enthusiastic and I found myself booked for session after session with the Ladies of the Round Table and the Ladies Institute *et al*: delightful, but in the end, I had to opt out. I couldn't do it, it would have meant staying for years.

At this time, I was asked if I would be interested in a large project in the downtown civic area of Honolulu, involving a fountain and a pool. I drew some sketches, which were accepted, and my name was included in the general contract. I signed a paper agreeing that I would do the job and then I returned to the UK, promptly forgetting about it.

To my amazement, I received a letter from the architect in 1976, telling me that the major building works were completed and could I present myself in Honolulu to execute the work on the fountain within the next four weeks. He enclosed an air ticket with a date to be confirmed. I dropped everything and left.

What I did not know at the time was that the architect had me monitored throughout the journey, to make sure that I was on schedule. When I arrived in Honolulu I was met by a welcoming committee, complete with *leis*, the traditional floral garland. They were very generous: they gave me the use



Sculpted ring beam water feature, Downtown Honolulu

SELF PORTRAIT: THE EYES WITHIN



RIGHT: Cleaning sculpture after mould has been removed, Downtown Honolulu

TOP LEFT AND BOTTOM LEFT: Detail 'cascade' water feature, Downtown Honolulu

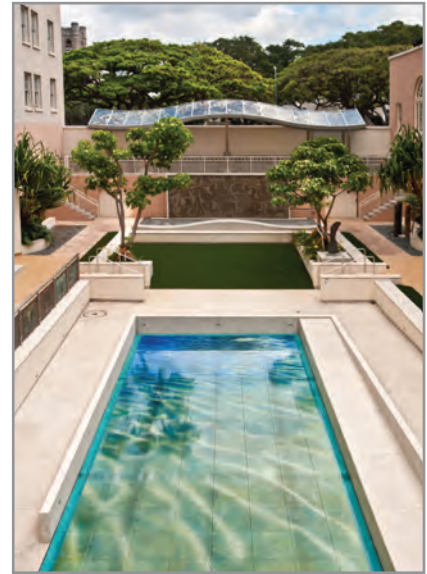
of a fantastic Thunderbird car with the key already in the ignition, a beautiful flat overlooking the sea and marina, and a fridge stocked with every delicacy that Honolulu had to offer.

The project was at the downtown civic square, like the town halls in England, but in the sun. The Civic Community Building was built on two levels: the top was a promenade with a post office, cafeterias, seating, shades, flowers and so on; and the lower level housed all the administration offices, such as licensing and welfare.

I decided to create some monolithic slabs in concrete – symbolic of Polynesian figures, evocative of the colossal figures on Easter Island. Polynesians had a great heritage of decorative work: they



The water feature



TOP: Mural based on Polynesian culture and lifestyle – freely drawn sandblasting in two coloured concrete layers

BOTTOM LEFT: Mural refurbished and re-sited at the new sculpture garden, Honolulu (image courtesy Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts)

BOTTOM RIGHT: New sculpture garden, Honolulu. Project manager: Jonathan Johnson (Art in Public Places Program, Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts)

ALOHA

used decoration on their own skins and on articles of everyday use. They were almost wedded to the sea and sailed the Pacific by dead reckoning without the aid of instruments. (And we think we discovered these ‘primitive’ people?) My chunky monolithic shapes were to be ‘balanced’ in a half circle, which was ‘bitten’ out of the upper terrace. This meant that you could view the fountain on both levels of the building. Each of the white concrete slabs was carved and then shot-blasted to expose the white aggregate. Some of the shapes looked like giant waves and the water cascaded over them into the pool at the base. It looked as if it had been there for a thousand years.

A friend recently photographed the sculpture on the Federal Building, after spotting a plaque acknowledging that I was the sculptor. The fountain is still in the same place, but the building has been extended to envelope it and it is now a little more difficult to find.

In 2011, I received an email from the Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, letting me know that one of my murals was to be refurbished and relocated to a new sculpture garden. This mural is a large concrete panel, stained and sandblasted with a profusion of Hawaiian-style dancing figures and flora – my representation of the spirit of Hawaii. I was asked to do this the day before I left and I thoroughly enjoyed covering the panel at speed, with free-flowing sandblasted shapes in celebration of my time in Hawaii and with some nostalgia at having to leave. The HiSAM sculpture garden has been given an award by the American Society of Landscape Architects – my mural covers the whole of one wall at the far end.