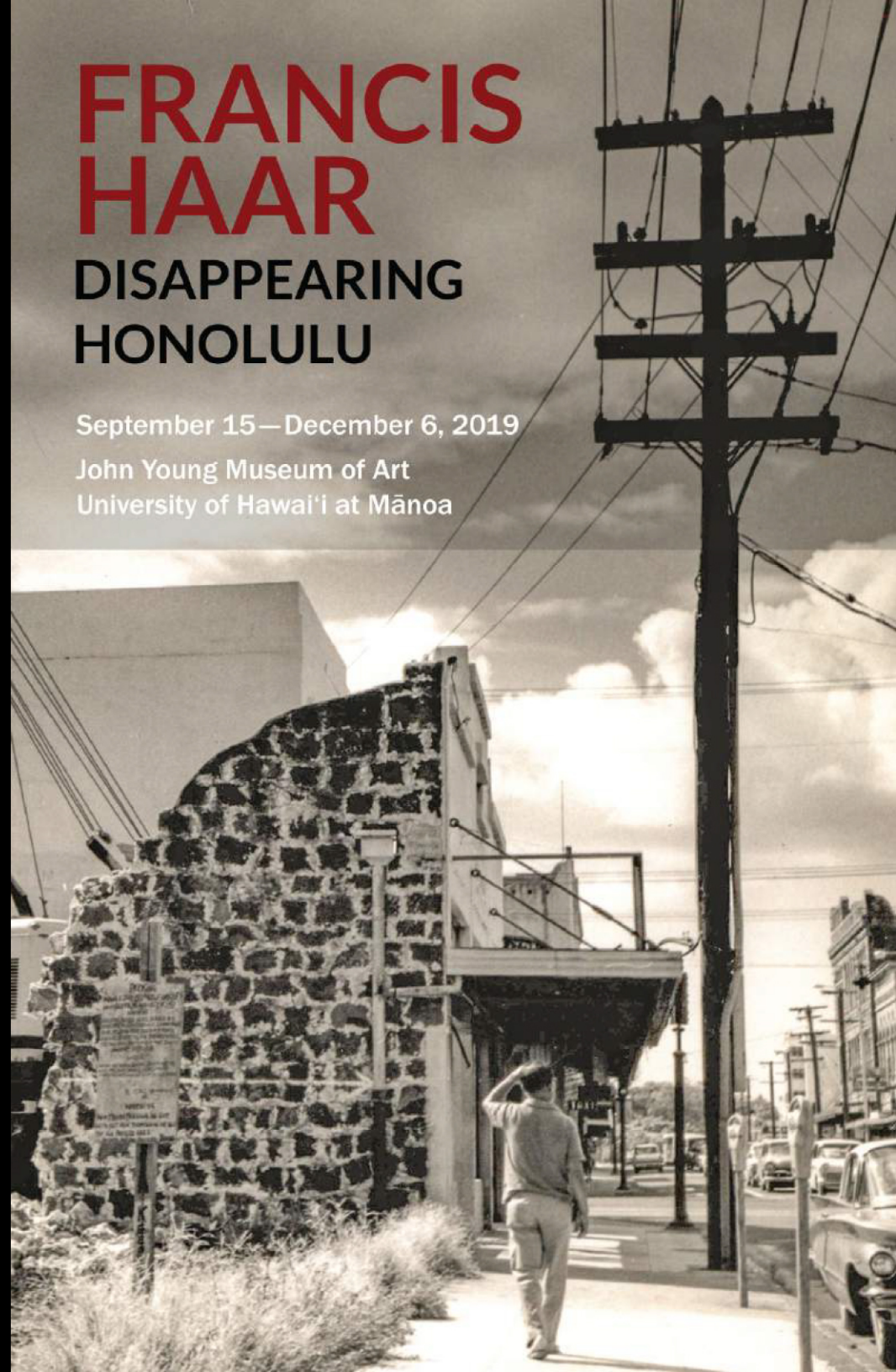


FRANCIS HAAR

DISAPPEARING HONOLULU

September 15—December 6, 2019

John Young Museum of Art
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa



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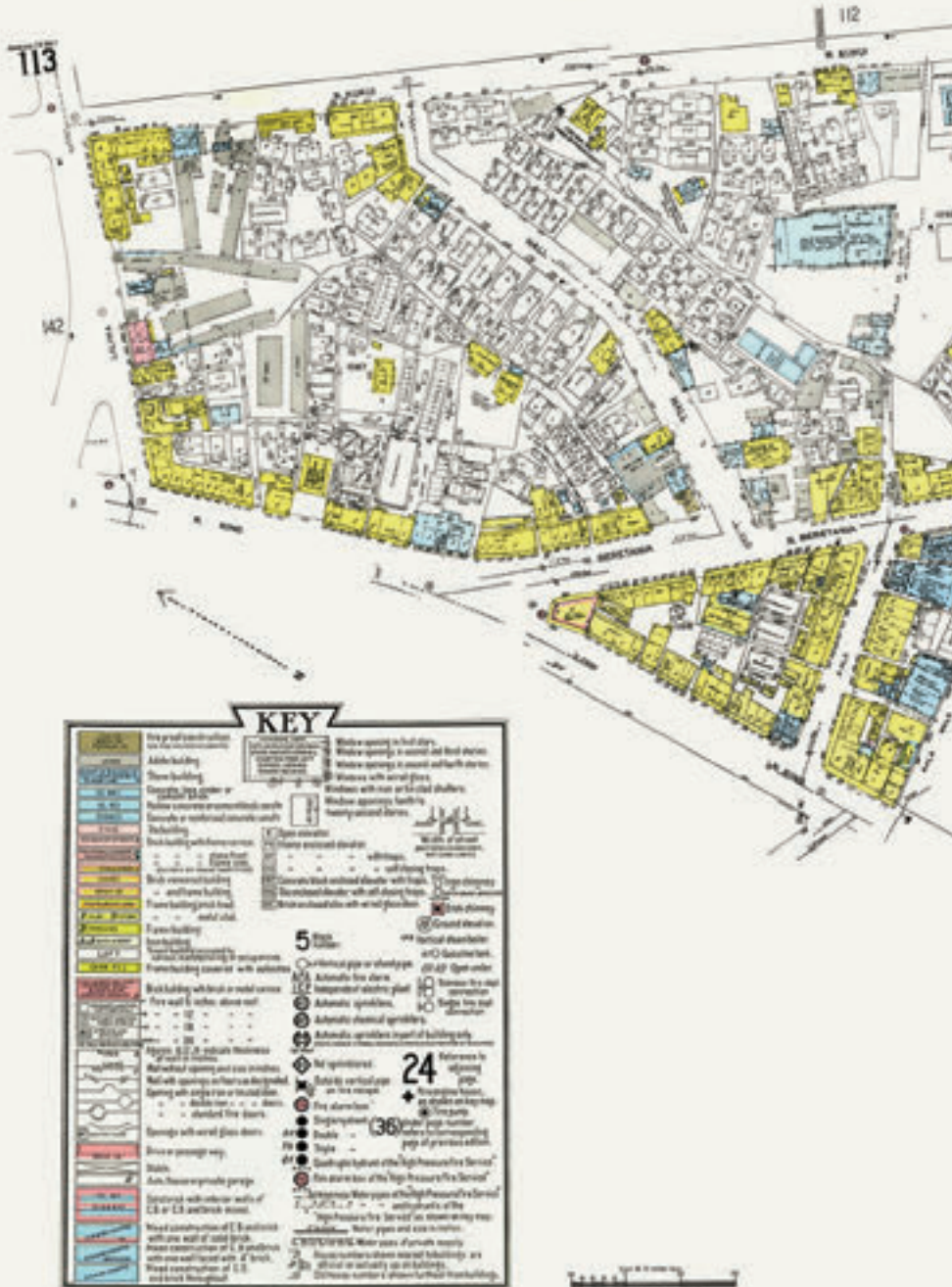




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Figure 1. Photographer Unknown. Francis Haar (left) with Andrew Lind (right) at an exhibition of Haar's photographs at University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 1963.

Francis Haar

Disappearing Honolulu

I have long admired Francis Haar's 1968 film, *Aala – Life and Death of a Community*, made collaboratively with Stephen Bartlett and my former colleague Kenneth Bushnell. Edited in a non-narrative approach, the film documents 'A'ala, a working-class residential and commercial neighborhood in Honolulu, in a moment of being demolished to make way for a city park. Haar has a keen eye for details and each shot is beautifully composed. I have shown this 16mm black-and-white film in every beginning photography course I have taught, as an example of work that has both visual acuity and social relevance.

In 2018 I visited Malia Van Heukelem (Art Archivist Librarian) at the University's Hamilton Library Collections. I was overjoyed to learn that along with the film, Haar had also made hundreds of still images of this period of Honolulu in transition. The collections' holdings include work prints, negatives, and contact sheets. This exhibition is comprised of a selection of these objects.

Disappearing Honolulu takes its title from a 1963 project undertaken by Francis Haar and Andrew Lind, a professor of sociology. They displayed a selection of Haar's photographs at UH Mānoa's George Hall, the former home to the Department of Art (figure 1). Customary of the period, the prints were mounted on poster boards and captioned with short descriptions. While isolated photographs from this project have been shown and published, this 1963 exhibition was the only occasion where a large selection of Haar's series was shown. It is my belief that it warrants renewed consideration.

Haar's photographs and film are valuable documents of a not-so-distant past that capture one of Honolulu's diverse communities in the midst of urban displacement—a theme that remains relevant today as Honolulu undergoes another period of transformation.

In the development for this exhibition, I relied much on the expertise and insights of Malia Van Heukelem. I am also grateful to Ian Lind, Lorraine Minatoishi, and Maika Pollack for their essays in this exhibition pamphlet; Tom Haar for his generosity in sharing information about his father; and Natalie Besl and Don Hibbard for their assistance in identifying some of the locations where Haar made his photographs. This project would not have been possible without them.

Gaye Chan, Curator

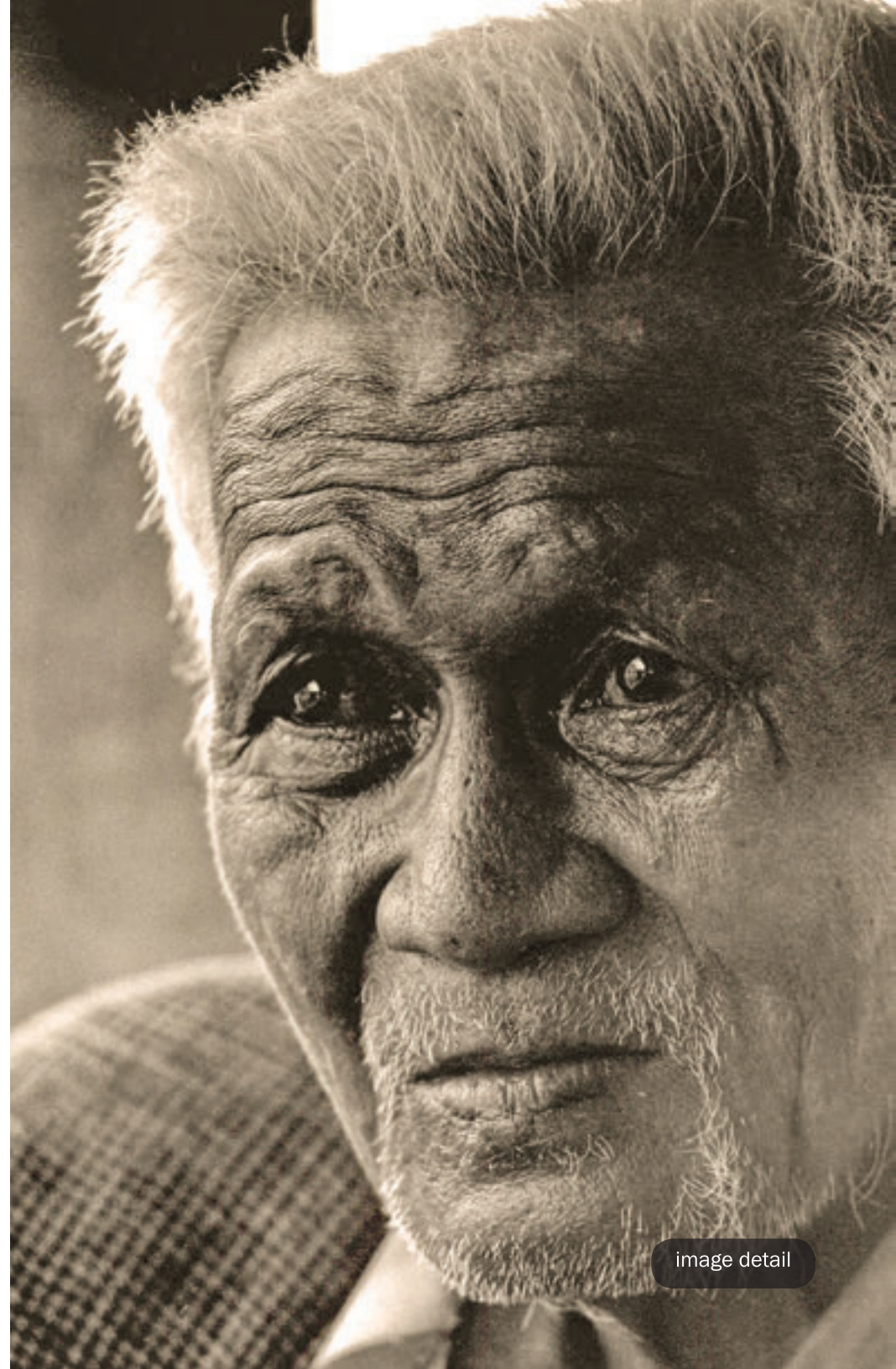


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Figure 2, Haar, Francis.

On The Street

Maika Pollack

Reformers have long observed city people loitering on busy corners, hanging around in candy stores and bars and drinking soda pop on stoops, and have passed a judgement, the gist of which is: 'This is deplorable! If these people had decent homes and a more private or bosky outdoor place, they wouldn't be on the street!' This judgement represents a profound misunderstanding of cities. (Jacobs 72)

Francis Haar is primarily known for his medium-format portraits of traditional art practitioners, his documentary films, and his stints in Paris, Tokyo, and Honolulu. However, he wrote the following about the first photographs he made, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, while studying architectural design at the National Academy of Industrial Arts in Hungary:

I purchased my first camera in 1929 and concentrated initially on the buildings that were being designed...photographing the construction sites and so on....With my background as an architectural designer, I knew how to photograph buildings from the most advantageous angle, and soon I was working for other architects—this time as a photographer. The work was a great pleasure to me. I really enjoyed the feeling of being involved right at the beginning all the way to the end, from the taking of the picture through the developing, printing, enlarging and mounting. (Haar 2-3)

This account of his origin remains relevant for his photographs of 'A'ala and its surrounding neighborhoods, taken almost thirty years later and half a world away. The photographs included in this exhibition, *Disappearing Honolulu*, curated by Gaye Chan, are drawn from hundreds of photographs that Haar made between 1963 and 1967. Along with his 1968 16mm film, *Aala - Life and Death of a Community*, a collaboration with Stephen Bartlett and Kenneth Bushnell, these works offer evidence of Haar's sensitivity toward the documentation and visual preservation of changing urban architectural spaces. In them we can also see a resonance with the politics of the 1960s.

In (figure 2), Haar established the architectural character of 'A'ala's neighborhood, silhouetting a three-story Victorian tenement house against a gray sky to emphasize the building's lacy façade, balcony, and colonnade. The image's wide composition also takes in its urban context, the convenient proximity to ample parking, and a corner grocery. In perhaps the most dramatic image in the exhibition (figure 3), a silhouetted tractor maw towers over the recently relocated Izumo Taishakyo Shrine standing behind a field of rubble—a face-off between tradition and urban change, metaphorically foreshadowing the end of the neighborhood.



Figure 3, Haar, Francis.

Most importantly, Haar's photographs offer rich glimpses of the neighborhood's inhabitants. In an image reminiscent of Lewis Hine's earliest portraits of the humanity of tenement dwellers in New York's Lower East Side, "China-town Family, Three Generations," a grandmother and son pose with a small boy and three kittens. Haar's documentation of a pile of rubble shows the busy street out front, a row of people seated, appearing rapt as they watch the process, under an urban skyline behind telephone wires and a tangle of residential apartment buildings. "Chinese Herbs" captures seventeen people of several generations in front of a traditional Chinese medicine store—the picture is as crowded as the fabled tenements.

As we can see from Haar's contact sheets, he mainly used a medium-format camera—a Mamiya C33 twin-lens reflex—to produce "Disappearing Honolulu." This camera can be called the Japanese version of Diane Arbus' beloved Rolleiflex (which she famously used starting in the early 1960s) made with a body for shooting portraits rather than buildings. In contrast to a large format glass plate camera's ability to better capture the geometry of architecture, the Mamiya (as does the Rolleiflex) allows for a direct interaction between the photographer and their subject without the intermediary apparatus of a lens between them; the camera can be focused and the picture can be framed by glancing down at the ground glass screen, made for that purpose. This viewfinder element can make the process of capturing a photograph less intimidating, and more of a spontaneous event. Of course, it still does have a superior negative size in comparison to the 35mm.

In Haar's contact sheets we find images that never made it to print: lei makers, young men swimming in Nu'uaniu Stream, dozens of portraits, more buildings presumably slated for demolition. They give us a sense of how long he lingered at a pool hall, and perhaps an even stronger feeling for how much he was drawn to people. A multi-generational family portrait taken in a bar, a newborn baby, several families; these faces on the contact sheets provide proof of what drew Haar to shoot. There are some handsome medium format images of houses, but for the most part Haar's argument is made through the people and faces of 'A'ala. Haar's photograph of Roberto's Book Exchange shows books overflowing from shelves with categories like "Hawaiian" and "Arts" and an older inhabitant enjoying a volume off of a shelf. Jane Jacobs' influential 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, proposed that it is the local and personal texture to urban space that makes a city thrive: mom-and-pop stores, bookstores, street life. While I cannot say for certain that Haar had read Jacobs' book, his "Disappearing Honolulu" can be presented as a chapter of evidence for her argument. Jacobs was writing in opposition to New York City's powerful public official and urban planner Robert Moses, whose monolithic changes to New York wreaked havoc on communities like Sunset Park and Brooklyn, and threatened her native Greenwich Village. Some part of this resistance to eminent domain and



Figure 4. Lyon, Danny. *View Through the Rear Wall, 89 Beekman Street, 1967* from the series *The Destruction of Lower Manhattan*. 1969. The Macmillan Company, New York.

top-down gentrification of ethnically diverse and working-class communities, echoes out of Haar's work in 'A'ala. Jacobs' sentiment of how "Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city's wealth of public life may grow" (95) resonates with Haar's portraits of the thriving street life in a misunderstood neighborhood.

Indeed, Haar's project was contemporaneous with others by continental US documentary photographers. Danny Lyon photographed the changes to downtown Manhattan driven by Moses' urban planning and his shift of the wholesale produce markets from Manhattan's Washington Market to Hunts Point in the Bronx. Lyon's work, shot with a 4x5 Calumet view camera, shows the destruction around his studio in Lower Manhattan where he lived alongside artist friends. Seeing the changes surrounding the area he sought out a state arts council grant to photograph the process, eventually publishing the

book *The Destruction of Lower Manhattan* in 1969. In *100 Gold Street, New York, 1967* a giant crane maw and a gaping hole, left from a torn out wall, frames a view of the city skyline. *View Through the Rear Wall, 89 Beekman Street, New York, 1967* (figure 4) shows the almost formal arrangement that the remains of a demolished building leaves on a painted brick wall. Many pictures were created from inside construction sites, and they capture the found sculpture of abandoned architecture and personal artifacts left behind in the empty space, including *Staircase, 183 William Street, New York, 1967* and *88 Gold Street, New York, 1967*. In these, Lyon was entering already abandoned apartments, as the inhabitants had been removed in 1967 when the “urban renewal” project exerted eminent domain.

Lyon’s project was almost simultaneous to Haar’s. Both photographed in black and white, and were better known for their documentary approach to people rather than architecture. Each of them turned to documentary film after their photography projects were completed—Haar with his series on Hawaiian artists, Lyon with his work for Robert Frank on Frank’s films. For Lyon, the series appears briefly, after his biker pictures (*The Bikeriders* was published in 1968) and before his Texas prison project. That said there are stark differences between the two men as well. Lyon’s photographs are largely uninhabited except for workers, with Lower Manhattan’s architecture functioning as a stand-in for Greece or Rome, made ancient through the process of demolition: “I came to see the buildings as fossils of a time past,” he wrote in his book’s introduction (Sussman 33–41). By contrast, Haar’s Honolulu is a mecca of integration teeming with street life and cultural texture.

A historical reflection of photography would place both Lyon and Haar in an illustrious line of photographers who recorded the fast-changing cities around them, including Eugène Atget, Charles Marville, and Édouard Baldus. In various ways, these three photographers all documented the mid-nineteenth-century destruction and reconstruction of Paris, a process of ‘renovation’ known as Haussmannization, after its principal architect Georges-Eugène Haussmann. The founding mission of the French commission to photograph ancient monuments—the Mission Héliographique, which Baldus was a part of—echoed an original hope for photography (in its 1839 public announcement) to document architectural details in order to create an archive which might be of use to future scholars and architects. In a sense, Haar was like many photographers—a documenter of present and past moments, pursuing the art of lost places, fleeting shadows, and passing emotions. Haar’s own Buddhism would have paired well with this use of the photographic medium. However, unlike any of the other photographers mentioned—Atget, Marville, Baldus, Lyon—Haar was not sponsored by the government or the state to photograph his disappearing Honolulu. His son Tom Haar recalls, “My father did not receive any State or Federal art grants for *Disappearing Honolulu*....His ‘A’ala film project expense was split three



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ways between Bartlett, Bushnell, and Haar. They applied for a grant to then Hawai'i Governor John Burns, who turned them down with a cynical reply as to 'Who would be interested to document this flea-infested section of old Honolulu?'"

Also in distinction to those photographers, who tended to photograph early in the morning, shooting in long exposures, and omitting people from their image—in his essay "A Small History of Photography" Walter Benjamin famously likened Atget's pictures to crime scene photographs (256)—Haar's photographs are notably full of people. If, to Benjamin, Atget's photographs are "crime scenes," then I would propose that Haar's photographs of 'A'ala are theater sets, with diverse figures inhabiting the backdrop of a town slated for destruction. Haar's images give the impression that this is a thriving community. A place in which a unique social and cultural blend prospers, and unique dramas and scenes unfold. It could be said that this photographic impression anticipated the tendency of artwork in the 1970s to interrogate urban environments and change—think of Gordon Matta-Clark's practice, starting in 1972, of illegally entering derelict buildings and using them to make temporary sculpture, and George Maciunas' 1966 to 1975 Fluxhouse cooperatives.

Ultimately, the questions that Haar's photographs ask carry an intimate and local tone: Who is the older woman with long grey hair crossing the street with the ukulele? What prompted the hatted man to squeeze his sweetheart under the 'Follies' banner? We need to wait to see what will happen next; above all, the images suggest, this is a theater unworthy of demolition. In his work in 'A'ala, Haar reverses the trope of the photographer working for the state to photograph buildings slated for demolition, and instead works for himself. His images show the beauty and cultural vibrancy of a "flea-infested section of old Honolulu," before it would be forever altered.

In this incredible show, curated by Gaye Chan, we see both a small project by Haar and an encapsulation of the larger politics of resistance of his moment.

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Footnote

¹ See Lynne Cooke and Douglas Crimp's *Mixed Use, Manhattan: Photography and Related Practices* for an excellent account of photography's use of abandoned urban spaces in the 1970s. This catalog was made for an exhibition opening at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, Spain.



4 A'ala & its Surrounding Areas 1902–1960

Lorraine Minatoishi

'A'ala Park was completed in 1902 and is located at 280 North King Street in Honolulu, Hawai'i. The park has been a part of downtown Honolulu since the late 1890s and was also known as "A'ala International Park (or River Park) in the early 1900s. The park featured a bandstand and two baseball diamonds. It was a popular gathering spot where political rallies, baseball games, and fairs took place.

The park was a result of Emma M. Nakuina's (longtime curator for the Royal National Museum at Ali'iōlani Hale) initial 1896 petition for a public space on the reclaimed land across from Nu'uano Stream. Nakuina, in support of a major park, noted that many elderly Hawaiians were forced to move to town with their children because they had no way to support themselves otherwise. The Hawaiian people had little financial standing and lived in poor conditions above Chinese-owned shops. Nakuina named the park "A'ala Park. This was the proper Hawaiian word for the district, as opposed to "Pālama" which was the commonly misused term for the area at the time. 'A'ala, meaning "fragrant," describes the historical fragrance of the trees that King Kamehameha's wife Ka'ahumanu planted to line the area.

When the park was established, many Chinese immigrants were residing, and running commercial and retail establishments, in the vicinity. The plague and the Chinatown fire of 1900, as well as Chinese immigrants settling in outlying areas of Kaimukī, caused a shift in the population. Similar to Chinatown being a cultural hub for Chinese immigrants, between 1902 and 1941 'A'ala became known as Japantown. 'A'ala met the needs of many Japanese immigrants looking to relocate as they moved off of the plantations after the Hawaiian Organic Act in 1900. During the period of free immigration, it also provided a landing spot for arriving migrants who were merchants and tradesmen. The population increased significantly in the 1920s, as plantation workers and urban residents began to gravitate toward the cultural hub.

Japanese-owned and -operated hotels provided ample space to house 'A'ala's growing population and accommodate its weekend visitors. The most common visitors were plantation workers. Early in the morning they would arrive by taxi or train, and shop at the local stores for fabrics, produce, and Japanese goods. The day would then lead them to popular restaurants for lunch, before heading to a movie at one of the theaters or to an athletic event in the square. The theaters screened silent films and traditional movies, and offered live entertainment to the community. The theaters and

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entertainment areas were platforms for which Japanese creative culture could be shown to the general public, and where immigrants could enjoy cultural events.

‘A‘ala Park also provided a secure space for social movements and organized protests. The strengthened neighborhood united together multiple times for demonstrations, speakers, and strikes, such as the great Japanese strike of 1909, and the 77 Cents Parade protest of the 1920 Japanese and Filipino sugar strike.

In 1918, ‘A‘ala Market was organized on the makai side of ‘A‘ala Park. It offered vendors an expanded zone at a prime location next to the railroad and dockyards, where many Japanese workers passed through daily. By 1931, one of the largest shopping centers in Honolulu formed The ‘A‘ala Rengo. This was the first organized shopping complex for Hawaii’s Japanese population. According to Michael M. Okihiro, principal author of *A‘ala: The Story of a Japanese Community in Hawaii*, “The ‘A‘ala Rengo, which means alliance, union, or organization, originally was the name adopted by the group of merchants in the area who got together to deal with the landlord which was the Oahu Railway and Land Company (OR&L).” Being in close proximity to the railcar depot and streetcar termination point was an important part of ‘A‘ala Rengo and ‘A‘ala Market’s success with tourists and visitors.

In the 1930s there were at least eight hotels in the ‘A‘ala area that primarily catered to Japanese patrons. The four main hotels were located facing ‘A‘ala Park, on the short section of Beretania Street known as Hotel Row. Larger hotels had up to fifty rooms, and smaller ones were established in back rooms of private homes. Hotel Row remained the popular spot up until WWII and the development of Waikiki, which ultimately became the center of tourism for O‘ahu.

‘A‘ala also had a strong religious presence, which is another reason of the area’s success during the 1920s and 1930s. From 1914 through WWII, there were four Japanese temples and churches within ‘A‘ala. They brought a sense of belonging and security to the people of their culture.

On December 7, 1941, all of this changed with the onset of WWII. Japanese business owners were sent to detention camps for the duration of the war, and many of the retail businesses, religious establishments, hotels, fish markets, and social clubs were shuttered.

The community of ‘A‘ala Park, a once thriving and dynamic neighborhood, became a struggling district with separated families carrying an overwhelming sense of loss. As the Japanese population declined, the military population of the area increased, along with a demand for brothels, billiard rooms, and bars.

The 1947 cessation of the rail service was another devastating blow to ‘A‘ala. The lack of public transit resulted in the scarcity of pedestrians. Those who did venture to ‘A‘ala in automobiles, found a decimated business community. Upon the end of WWII in 1945, the community’s hope for post-war revitalization of the cultural hub was not to be. Ala Moana Shopping Center was completed in 1959 and it offered a new model of shopping destination. Those Japanese business owners who could afford to restart their businesses opted to forego ‘A‘ala.

‘A‘ala was soon to be seen as an undesirable location within Honolulu. “‘A‘ala Park and its surroundings began to attain a reputation as a place for people living on the edge. Dance Halls, poolrooms, and slum housing began to characterize the area. The park became home for the homeless and a haven for druggies” (Okihiro). ‘A‘ala thus became a prime target for urban renewal, a trend spreading across the United States. The area was razed to make way for the new Kukui Redevelopment Project in the 1960s.

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'A'ala & its Surrounding Areas 1958...

Ian Lind

During the first several decades of the 20th century, the 'A'ala district was a thriving community of Japanese immigrants, with its own hotels and rooming houses, movie theaters, places of worship, storefronts lining several streets, and businesses offering an array of goods and services to customers who came from around the island.

But when a late-night fire broke out in a portion of the 'A'ala Triangle in mid-November 1958, firefighters found a dilapidated slum of two-story wooden buildings, with individuals and family crowded together in squalid conditions, most without basic sanitation and plumbing. The fire left an estimated 150 people homeless, and badly damaged 16 businesses. It also brought renewed attention to conditions in the densely populated areas around downtown Honolulu where, as in 'A'ala, older and decaying tenement buildings and other makeshift homes, most built before the adoption of building, plumbing, and fire codes, were often tucked away, out of sight, along narrow winding pathways behind aging storefronts.

Solutions to address Honolulu's slums had been debated since well before 1920 but the problem had always been the same. When the government lacks political will to provide affordable housing, privately owned substandard buildings are allowed to continue to deteriorate, and landlords continue to collect rents from new generations of tenants.

Then came the American Housing Act (AHA) of 1949, which authorized federal grants and loans to states and local communities for slum clearance and urban redevelopment. Under the AHA local governments would be able to acquire land under crowded slums through condemnation. The areas would then be cleared, and the properties resold, usually to private developers. Typically federal funds covered two-thirds of the cost, and local governments paid the balance. Hawai'i quickly jumped on the slum clearance bandwagon and created the Honolulu Redevelopment Agency (HRA), which centralized planning and implementation.

By the time of the 'A'ala Triangle fire, the agency planned to clear and redevelop about 182 acres between School and King Streets, and from Liliha to Queen Emma streets. The area comprised almost one-third of Honolulu's urban core. Although the triangle project involved only 4.1 acres, the area was the most densely populated, and included the city's most deteriorated buildings.

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Although the federal legislation called for the active involvement of affected communities, robust consultation was not the norm. For example, after the fire the HRA considered several options, finally rushing forward with its plan to clear the triangle area in order to extend neighboring 'A'ala Park. HRA believed the new park was needed to beautify the gateway to Honolulu, as it was one of the first glimpses of the city that greeted the growing number of tourists driving from the airport to Waikiki.

A hastily gathered petition, signed by 200 triangle residents, landowners, or neighbors, called instead for a business-residential project, was ignored. The park plan was rushed through the City Council later that same month. Unsurprisingly, when it was completed, the new park went largely unused.

Nancy Bannick, a leading critic of the process, berated redevelopment officials for backroom deals that, she said, made “a mockery” of the citizen participation requirement. More importantly, where redevelopment officials saw only irredeemable slums, Bannick—and Francis Haar—saw and appreciated remaining bits of the area’s storied past, as well as current scenes of vitality and life amidst the poverty and decay. Capturing those discordant sounds and images on film remains Haar’s gift to us.



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Artist

Francis Haar (1908 – 1997) is among Hawaii’s best-known modernist photographers. He relocated to Hawai‘i with his family in 1960 and produced numerous films and thousands of images on Hawaiian culture and the artistic community in Hawai‘i. His work is in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Hungary Museum of Photography (Kecskemét), and the Hawai‘i State Foundation for Culture and the Arts. Haar also taught photography at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa between 1965 and 1985.

Curator

Gaye Chan is UHM Professor and was Acting Museum and Gallery Director April 2018–July 2019. As an artist Chan’s solo exhibitions include *Art in General* (New York City), *Articule* (Montreal), *Artspeak* (Vancouver), *Gallery 4A* (Sydney), *Honolulu Museum of Art* (Honolulu), *SF Camerawork* (San Francisco), *Southern Exposure* (San Francisco), and *YYZ Artist Outlet* (Toronto). Her work has been supported by Art Matters and the Creative Capital Foundation.

Essay Contributors

Ian Lind is an award-winning investigative reporter, columnist, and blogger who has written about Hawai‘i politics, public ethics, white collar crime and related topics since 1990. He has also worked as a newsletter publisher, public interest advocate and lobbyist, peace educator, and legislative staffer. He has won multiple top awards in the annual competitions sponsored by the Hawai‘i Professional Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists for his reporting and columns on local issues. Lind is a lifelong resident of the islands.

Lorraine Minatoishi is the founder and owner of Minatoishi Architects, Inc, an architecture firm which specializes in residential, commercial, and historic preservation projects. She earned her Doctor of Engineering from the Waseda University in Tokyo where she focused her studies on ancient traditional Japanese architecture and the preservation of cultural buildings and sites of Hawai‘i.

Maika Pollack is Director and Chief Curator, John Young Museum of Art and University Galleries, and UHM Assistant Professor of Curatorial Studies and Art History. Pollack is Co-founder and Director of Southfirst (2000-2018), a contemporary art space in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. She has a PhD in Art History from Princeton University. Her writing on contemporary art and culture has been published by *The New York Times*, *Interview*, *ArtNews*, *Arforum*, *BOMB*, *Aperture*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, etc. and she was the Museum Exhibition Critic for *The New York Observer* from 2011–2015.

This pamphlet is produced on the occasion of the 2019 exhibition *Francis Haar: Disappearing Honolulu* at the John Young Museum of Art. All images included are by Francis Haar (1963-1968), unless otherwise noted.

Objects included in the exhibition—Francis Haar’s photographs, contact sheets, 16mm Kodak Ciné Special camera, and film boxes—are on loan, courtesy of the Francis Haar Collection, University of Hawai’i at Mānoa Library. Haar’s Mamiya camera is on loan from Tom Haar. All images are copyrighted.

Photographs in the exhibition are available from the following webpage, along with eighteen that are paired with street views from Google Map, screen-captured in 2019.

www.hawaii.edu/art/francis-haar-disappearing-honolulu



Sponsors : University of Hawai’i at Mānoa’s Department of Art & Art History and the College of Arts & Humanities; John Young Foundation, Cooke Foundation, Hawai’i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, through appropriations from the Legislature of the State of Hawai’i and by the National Endowment for the Arts; Halekulani Hotel—Hospitality Sponsor for the Arts at UH Mānoa; Treehouse, and anonymous donors.

