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Kingo "Melvin" Fujii Interview

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Interviewer: Andrea Duke
Artist: Mr. Kingo (Melvin) Fujii
In person interview, Wilmette, IL
Date: May 5, 2012

Note: The following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in AAS 203: Asian American Arts and Culture during the 2012 Spring Quarter as part of the Asian American Art Oral History Project conducted by Laura Kina, Associate Professor, Art, Media, & Design.

This interview began with Andrea Duke asking Mr. Fujii about his biography. He showed her a 3-ring binder/scrapbook of newspaper clippings, letters, pictures of his artworks, and events throughout his lifetime. They started by looking at homes he used to own in Wilmette, IL in the 1950s. Wilmette is an affluent northern suburb of Chicago located along the shore of Lake Michigan. This area is referred to as the “North Shore.” Mr. Fujii passed away on June 4th, 2012.

Artist Bio: Kingo Fujii was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai‘i where his parents were deeply involved in the Kabuki theater. His father was a director/actor, artist, and chief choreographer for the original Hawai‘i Kabuki Theater Group. His mother was a teacher of traditional Japanese musical instruments. Kingo Fujii attended the Honolulu Academy of Arts School, The Chicago Art Institute, the University of Hawai‘i and Instituto Allende, Mexico. He works in a variety of media such as oil, watercolor, lithography, jewelry and sculpture. As a fine artists he addresses himself through surrealism, semi-impressionism and traditional or neo-orientalism. As a scientific illustrator his interests and applications are in many fields – zoological, botanical, archeological, etc. He is also an illustrator of children’s books. He has illustrated for Encyclopedia Britannica, Harper and Row, Highlander Press, Reverie Publishing, and other textbook publishers. (Biography and photograph courtesy of the artist).
Interview Transcript:

**Kingo Fujii:** When I moved to Wilmette, it was 1959 and I was the first person of Japanese descent to move to the North Shore. In 1959 there were no civil rights laws and I was the first one to move in.

**Andrea Duke:** Where did you move from? From Hawai‘i?

**KF:** I was born and raised in Hawai‘i, yeah.

**AD:** When did you move here [to Chicago]?

**KF:** I came to Chicago in 1951 [to attend the Art Institute of Chicago] and I moved here [Wilmette, IL] in 1959. As I said, I was the first Asian American to move into East Wilmette, east side of the track and I was trying to get the Japanese Americans to move in. No people who came to the Chicago area came there from the camps, you know those concentration camps, and they were all moving into the city. I sold the first house because I thought my kids would be happier since there’d be other Asians, you know. They’d be happier in Hawai‘i. I sold my house and went back to Hawai‘i. So while I was in Hawai‘i for a whole year looking for a house, which was a wild experience, and anyway, we came back to the neighborhood [Wilmette]...and we bought the house at the corner here and that’s the second house. So I’ve been in the North Shore all along and I’ve been trying to get the Japanese Americans to move in. So what happened, I [may have] started a wave of Japanese moving into the North Shore. But they were Japanese national business people - managers. I met and became friendly with the executive vice president of the Dai-Ichi Kangyo Bank [later known as the First Pacific Bank in the 1980s]. It was, at that time, it was the largest bank in the world...we became social friends and he moved his manager in and his manager was a few doors away in the neighborhood and he had to go back and return to Japan because he finished his time overseas, yeah. At that time, there were no Japanese programs on television and I said, “Hey I’ll be glad to die here if we had some television programs.” He had his bank sponsor a Japanese Series - samurai movie series. When he went back to Japan the company stopped it, you see, but then a lot of Japanese American district managers started to move in to the area. I created a wave of Japanese moving in, you know, So anyway that’s the beginning of my life here in Wilmette.

**AD:** You took part in the *Artists of Hawai‘i* exhibit sponsored by the committee of the Honolulu Academy of the Arts?

**KF:** I was still a student and Jean Charlot is a very famous mural, fresco mural artist. And if you can read it, what it says in the dark spot [referring to a photograph]...it was a yearly museum exhibit at the Honolulu Academy of the Arts and it [my work] was chosen, selected and the high compliment was that my work had a creative impact equal to the masters of the period, That’s a high compliment as a Cubist, yeah. The cubistic period...

**AD:** [looking at more photos]...so these awards are from the Honolulu Academy also? Isle student with honors.
KF: That was high school. [laughs] The high school put it in and it was in the museum high school show exhibit. The cat and the horse are my favorite subjects [the painting’s subject I was looking at was a horse].

AD: The cat and the horse?

KF: See that semi-abstraction encompasses that one [painting] over there in the corner? …I like the stylization, minimalism.

AD: Yeah, it’s clean.

KF: So I did go back to Hawaii for the big show.

AD: This was your show, Kingo Melvin Fujii…January 3rd, 1960?

KF: …the art editors of the newspaper called me on the phone and said it’s an all-access show, it’ll give you a lot of publicity in the papers and I guess they wanted to promote local artists.

AD: So this was put on by a library, not by the Academy?

KF: That was submitted by the newspaper.

AD: The the library of Hawai‘i…Okay so this says you went to the Honolulu Academy, the Chicago Art Institute, and then Institute Alldende Guatalenda Mexico

KF: Yeah

AD: In Mexico, too?

KF: Yeah…[looking at another photo] that’s the printmakers prize, the La review Moderne of Paris France. They sent me a letter, it’s in there, and they wanted to know…like you are interviewing me…

AD: “We intend on giving a biographical report on a certain number of exhibitors….31st annual exhibition, 50th national exhibition…”

KF: …the magazine La Review Moderne, but at that time I did not have easy access to make a reproduction for the copy and at that time, my thinking wasn’t very matured in the scope of my direction of my art career…but anyway, I sent them a posted money order for a copy of the magazine and I never got it. So somebody just kept the money. But then my neighbor, who was a professor of 17th century French literature, he was always going to Paris, you see. One year, he went to Paris and I told him to check the company La review Moderne and see if you can find the magazine in the archive. And he found it and he made copies. There’s only a mention of my work there but if I had sent them a photograph and more information about myself they probably would’ve given me a whole page…so I was in with the French! [laughs]
AD: Was that kind of the popular art scene at that time?

KF: …the change, the experimentation, the Impressionist people, yeah.

AD: How did you end up doing this book? [The Three Treasures: Myths of Old Japan by Miriam Cox and illustrated by Kingo Fujii] How did you meet Miriam Cox?

KF: …I was exhibiting at art fairs and this art editor knows my work and he wanted to me to illustrate a book and it just so happened the editor for Harper and Rowe was my neighbor [laughs]. I didn’t meet him before. That’s how I got to know him…so I did a book. It was very convenient. Ordinarily you don’t have the artists photograph in there. I exist equal time with the author. That’s why they got my photograph in there.

AD: So you did these illustrations especially for the book right?

KF: Right. These are some examples anyway. There’s a Chicago review again…

AD: 1959.

KF: At the art fair and they wanted me to contribute some illustrations, those 2 there, there were 3 lithograph…I like that one. The students at the university of Chicago liked that [lithograph of nude Asian toddler in front smiling] …I also finished a book on haiku, Japanese haiku, and I had that in there about people smiling at, laughing at funeral and funeral services, something like that you know, or laughing at funeral services [laughs]…

Living in this area as a Japanese American, by face value, probably I would have been prejudice against you know because “here’s a Japanese.” And at the time a booker didn’t have to show art off to anybody they really didn’t want to, it was just the way it was. There were no laws, civil rights laws. But I was showing exhibit art fairs all over Chicago, all over the North Shore and I was always in the newspapers you see. So I became familiar…the mayor of Wilmette, he was my neighbor, he classified me as the “most famous artist in Wilmette” and I was very well-known in North Shore, you know. I wasn’t just sitting around just being a nobody. If you’re a nobody you get prejudiced against. But I was very ACTIVE as an artist so it was good PR for the Japanese Americans really. And yet, I couldn’t get any Japanese Americans to move into [Wilmette and] buy my house, my first house. That’s right, but nobody would respond, you know, they would prefer to stay in the city.

[Looking at a photograph from 1940] …that picture was when I went back home to Honolulu and I was interviewed by the school newspaper and I told them something about my favorite artist Alexander Botticelli, that kind of thing you know.

AD: [reading the photograph caption] “‘Art has become my life and Farrington [high school] is where it all started…’ …how and what he paints Mr. Fujii replied ‘art is poetry, painting is like selling music and that’s the way I paint. I paint anything and everything and in that manner am more fortunate that most artists today for they cannot do this, full time anyway.’” True…that’s still true.
KF: I think that was from the Japanese American Service Committee…


KF: …they were fundraising in a way and I was doing some check painting directly on rice paper for sale so that’s a publicity in a way.

AD: So you were part of the Japanese American Service Committee?

KF: JASC? What about them?

AD: You were part of this group?

KF: No, I have nothing to do with them.

AD: No? Okay.

KF: For years, you know, I live in Wilmette, I have nothing to do with Chicago. They take care of the seniors in Chicago. That nothing to do with northern suburb in the North Shore here, Wilmette no. So I never joined.

AD: But you were doing these for a fundraiser for them?

KF: Yeah. Right.

AD: Where you a part of any other Asian or Asian American groups?

KF: [nods head]

AD: No?

KF: Membership. No. that’s why my kids were never able to involve into Japanese culture. Because the only place you go is the Buddhist temple in Chicago. Its too far, you see…as I say I was the only Japanese around here. So you know, I can’t be driving to Chicago all the time. …one of the art fairs there…[both laughing at a photo of Mr. Fujii sitting behind his hanging paintings only able to see the gazers/patrons from the neck down at the art fair entitled “What the artists see.”] they hide behind the paintings you know. That’s my wife and I. That’s Rush Street art fair.

AD: I’ve been there…Gold Coast art fair…that’s my favorite one…Midwest magazine …this was in Niles?

KF: …Niles yeah…
AD: …lots of art fairs…so this is...?

KF: I do miniature sculpture too, and jewelry work.

AD: …Glencoe…

KF: Yeah I was well-publicized by the newspaper, that was an exhibit at the Chicago Art Institute museum. I had a silver sculpture…I gave most of the [work] away already. My kids got them...I think that was Oak Park.

You know right before I moved back to Hawai‘i in 1969, at Oak Park art fair, “wow,” I said, “it’s my last time at exhibit”…every painting sold out. I sold every painting. Amazing, wow, [laughs] never happened before!

AD: And it was these ones? The landscape[s]?

KF: Yeah. You see it has the Japanese format and people would ask always, they always, well not always, but sometimes people would ask me “oh I love Japan,” they think I’m a Japanese national you know… identity problem here. And I keep saying “oh I’m not from Japan, right, I’m a Japanese American from Hawai‘i,” you know and [laughs] goes on and on and on…or one other at the Buddhist temple, this old Japanese gentleman, well I give him the benefit by calling him a gentleman, he went over across to my exhibit. It was a Japanese calligrapher you know, and he just came over to my exhibit. [He looked at] a picture of a Japanese old man…and he spoke in Japanese to the other Japanese fellow, he said “he doesn’t look Japanese” you know and…someone who was passing by says “oh and you look Korean” [laughs].

Don’t go by what other person look like. It’s like when I belonged to the Chicago British Club and one night we invited the British Navy, it was 2 destroyers that came in they were going to be put away, it was their last voyage, I think. And one woman, young woman, asked me, she was one of the guests anyway, we invited the sailors to the party, and she said “are you the Hong Kong connection?” I said “no I’m not the Hong Kong connection.” And she said “You don’t look British.” I said “Look, you don’t look British either, nobody looks typical anything you know.” [laughs] I don’t suppose I look typically Japanese. What does a typical Japanese look like? He could look Korean, he could look Chinese. That’s why I never had problems with racial problem…visibly anyway. The only time I had trouble was in Colorado.

It was in Denver. We stopped at a place for lunch at a place called “White Spot Inn,” and there were a lot of Mexican waitresses there and they wouldn’t come over. We just sat there sat and sat there, you know, and I said “Hey some things going on here, something’s wrong.” So there’s a guy, came over towards me, towards cash register nearby and [I] said “Hey mister, are we being ignored?” He immediately grabbed two waitresses to wait on us, and when I got to Denver to visit my Yucca Indian friend, who was living in Denver, and he was from west Chicago and anyway he said, when I told him what happened, he said I did the right thing. In Colorado, if you ignore an Indian, Native American, debilitate Native American, the proprietor is automatically fined $500, so the manager got scared see. They thought I was an Indian with my white wife and half baked kids you know? My white squaw you know? That sort of thing, but otherwise I don’t have that kind of problem.
I go to one Japanese store in Evanston and I bought something and I paid by check and his wife would say “your name looks Japanese but you don’t look Japanese” I said “You don’t look Japanese either,” you know [laughs]. This kind of rapport, it really is amazing…

AD: How did you get into doing miniature sculptures? …Where you always doing the sculptures while you were painting?...

KF: …I met a fellow who was a dental technician. He taught me the process of centrifugal casting, you know how dentists make crowns that kind of thing, and whether it’s a sculpture or not, it’s the same technique - lost wax technique… and it’s as simple as that. The rest is all creativity, making the prototype would be all wax you see and you burn it out and you cast that in your metal, yeah.

AD: Wow [looking through pictures of sculptures both in picture form and in person on a shelf in Mr. Fujii’s apartment].

KF: …you know my generation is called 2nd generation in Hawai‘i Japanese American, we say nikkei nisei because it means 2nd generation IN, not born in Hawai‘i, my parents are first generation, they weren’t born in Hawai‘i. They’re not American so we cannot say we are the second generation born. We’re generation IN, you see, so that’s probably why we go by the word nisei…there is a different generation, 2nd generation, much older people who are 2nd generation, and when I was a kid they were business men, dentists and that kind of thing, and they were older 2nd generation, but my generation age had the best years of life in Hawai‘i really. The 1st and 2nd generation developed the image of the Japanese in Hawai‘i and they fought for it really you know, they were discriminated against and that kind of thing so my age of 2nd generation, in a way, we had the best years in Hawai‘i …tourism wasn’t built up yet…

AD: What would you say [was your] style of art?

KF: I’m a painter… I am not a compulsive painter. There are people that say [their] life is all art, [but to] me that’s sort of affectation and the art first before anything else, you know. They spend all their money buying art materials that sort of thing and they sacrifice their mortal life for art. That’s affectation really. I’m not a compulsive painter, [with a] beautiful place, some people and some artists will typically say, “hey I’ve got to paint that” [and if] they try to copy the scenery [they] might as well take a photograph. You know? What’s interpretation? For me, I’m not that type of painter, I paint emotion, feelings. It’s like an unexplained Surrealist. Dali makes up his own title; what is inspired by his dreams and his sub consciousness. What I do [is] paint subconsciously really, so I’m painting emotion, feeling and even ideas but not just painting a figure or landscape or that sort of thing…that’s the scope of…the definition of me as an artist and I don’t feel bad if I don’t paint anything. I don’t feel guilty about it or anything like that. So whatever I feel I just express myself, even if I don’t know what the hell it’s all about.

[I won] the printmakers prize at the Academy of the Arts [and in that painting] there are two horses battling and there’s a baby in there. What’s the symbol of the baby? It’s a handless, earless, that one there…[looking at the drawing of two horses, one in which has a small baby hovering in front of it] but it has a creative force in there. That’s what the French critics saw in there. It’s a very powerful drawing but I don’t know what the meaning is and I don’t worry
about it. I’ve expressed something, [but] it used to bother me before. It’s somewhat intellectualism you know…so when I was a student it used to bother me [and] I felt [like] I wasn’t being intellectual enough. [Like] I wasn’t an intellectual painter, but I [stopped] worrying about that sort of thing, you know, I just expressed myself. Simple as that.

AD: …so you’re not doing it for a release or something?

KF: Everything you do is therapeutic, there’s no question about it. So yeah, its therapy, too, sure [and] it’s a release of tension… it’s a catharsis in other words, cathartic.

AD: So do you feel like if you’re in a bad mood, if you paint something [you’d feel better]?

KF: No, I don’t go by that. I’d rather talk on the telephone to someone.

AD: When you’re going to paint or sculpt something does it come to you as is and you just put it from your mind onto the paper or do you just start it and it ends up turning into something?

KF: [It’s] however I feel about doing it [at the time]. I mean sometimes I have a concept, yeah, and the subject matter is just a matter of my interest…it’s a part of my background, the subjects: sea-life, marine life, crabs, horses, and cats… I love crabs [laughs] …I’m an oceanic person, personality, I’m from Hawai’i…I’m not that equestrian, but I like [that] horses are a symbol of freedom and strength, yno, and nothing to do with Freud either (laughs).

[looking at a case with a large amount of Mr. Fujii’s hand-made jewelry and next to that a shelf with some small bronze sculptures and petroglyph rocks]

KF: …Those are petroglyphs. See again the sea life, fish, those can be all money makers, I’m not in it for money. You could say I’m a true artist. That’s making something out of nothing [from] rocks I picked up at Illinois State Park beach, I think. I used to drag home tons of them but I showed only one at the art and I stopped showing it [because there was a] kid he said I want this, you know, and I thought he was going buy it. He asked how did you make it so I told him since [I thought] he was going to buy one [and] after I told him how I did it he took off. [After that when people asked me the] trade secret of how I did it, [and it was] usually at the art fair, I would say “ancient Chinese secret” with a poker face, you know. [laughs] It’s a simple thing but I do other things also anyway.

AD: It doesn’t look simple. Where you affected at all by WWII?

KF: From Pearl Harbor to after Pearl Harbor to the end of the war when General McArthur said the war [was] over in Missouri, that wasn’t the end of the war. The end of the war was December 1946. I volunteered in the army in June of [19]46 after I graduated from high school. I chose to volunteer, so if you volunteered at that time you had a right to pick your area of operation [and] I chose Japan so that’s where I went. When I was there, the first assignment was Sigma Corps. My brother was in Tokyo and he had me transferred to Tokyo and I was in his company, which was surprisingly a good location. His outfit confiscated buildings and their [Japanese] homes and made [them into] hotels for the officers and their families. They remodeled them to American standards putting up a water tower, changing to flushing toilets, that sort of thing, and converting DC to AC. They didn’t know where to put me, assign me really. Originally in Kobe I was just a clerk typist then and just out of high school, but then in
Tokyo...under General MacArthur I was assigned to be an interpreter [laughs]. When I was a kid before Pearl Harbor, we had Japanese language school and in Hawai‘i the Japanese language school was paid for by the Japanese community. It wasn’t by the State. They were independent. Around 7th grade I decided I was tired of Japanese language school because you’d go to elementary school until 3 o’clock, then go to Japanese language school and I was tired of that. I was expecting a war really and I said, “gee, if there’s a war they’re going to have to close the Japanese school” and that’s what happened [laughs]. So anyway, in the army, I was supposed to be an interpreter and one day we went out in the field and the lieutenant wanted me to go in there [a home] and tell a woman she had to vacate [because] they were taking over the house. It was almost like a Frank Lloyd Wright house, there were a lot of them in Japan. That’s where Frank Lloyd Wright got his inspiration design-wise, you know. We had a Japanese national interpreter but he sent ME in! I was the Japanese in an American uniform okay; I suppose he thought [it] would have more impact you know. So, I went in there and I told the woman she had to vacate and we were taking it over, and she was crying. She said her daughter had tuberculosis. She was sleeping on the futon on the floor, and she was begging, begging, crying, and I [was] crying myself [too]. I was so angry [that] when I went back to the jeep I swore and the lieutenant, I used a four letter word, I swore at him and I said “I quit!” You don’t quit in the army...He [the lieutenant] was a nice guy, and [normally] if you swear at an officer you get court marshaled, but he said, “look Fujii, stay with us, summertime we’re going to have a lot of fun, we’ll picnic” and that sort of thing [and] I said, “no way.” So the next day I took off from work [and] I walked all over Tokyo. I [was] looking for the criminal investigation division, CID. I couldn’t find the office and I came across [the] criminal intelligence office. I went up there. I applied for a job and I got my job. I got into crime technology. I was the only soldier ever to go walk around looking for a job, who quit his job you know [laughs]. So I got a job with criminal intelligence and it was for the lab. Fortunately my officer was a nice guy, otherwise I’d be court marshaled.

I have a two DVD interviews. One you can borrow from JASC [Japanese American Service Committee]. The other one [interview] is from Go for Broke in Los Angeles, an educational group who interviews veterans [about] their experiences.1

AD: Both of your parents were in art?

KF: [My father] was a chief choreographer for original Kabuki theatre. He immigrated to Hawai‘i when he was about 16 years old all by himself and I suppose he was originally just a house boy, something like that I think. But he learned everything [about Kabuki]…there’s a lot, you need to learn everything. If you are the director of a Kabuki, you have to do the background, stage sanding, everything, and also be the teacher, and also be an actor...My mother and him were from the same village, Twin Village, [and] she came in [to Hawai‘i] and they got married. She was a musician, a teacher of samisen, a traditional musical instrument. Later on, when the silent movie came in, Kabuki Theater stared fading and becoming obsolete. He had his own company and they would go all around the islands presenting Kabuki plays to the plantation workers. They were starving for Japanese culture, but he couldn’t make a living that way, you know. It [was] an off-and-on thing so he opened up his restaurant and catering service. He did well, for a 16 year old kid he did okay. He died when I was 10 years old.

AD: How did you get into art?
KF: Genetically maybe. I was always interested in it. In grade school, in Hawai‘i, I guess the teachers knew the background of my father [because] he was listed as an artist so they [teachers] always made me the class artist. So I just did things automatically as an artist, functioned as an artist anyway.

AD: Do you have a favorite piece?

KF: Yeah. (laughs)…it was an oil painting… [it] had Moses, Buddha, Abraham, I think. A group of deities and they were all in a circle. It was a dark environment and they’re focusing on something in the circle [which] was a pair of dice, snake eyes. Nobody wins in a religious war. That was my favorite painting, but I was afraid to show it at art fairs really because of the Arabs. It (the painting) is an insult to Muhammad. I never showed it at an art gallery because of the double standard. In a gallery you have high prices and have to maintain a high price, you know, and at the art fair you lower your prices. So I [didn’t want] split values there…there was no title and someone bought it so it’s in someone’s collection now.

There was one woman and she wanted to open a gallery in Chicago and she picked me out to be one of the first exhibitors and that’s the first time I showed in an exhibit. It was so embarrassing for me, I won all the prizes [laughs]. Oh my gosh, it was really embarrassing. Ordmeyer Gallery [in Chicago]. My favorite subject at the time was maskery. People wear masks. In [one painting] the kids [are] inspecting the masks, they’re innocent, and they’re influenced by the maskery of the adults. It was a very serious art seller; but the subject matter was very depressing.

AD: Who was your main audience?

KF: All kinds [of people]. Artists who show at an art show are helping [to] educate people. [Some] people will never go into a museum, but it’s art in the street and they [may] get interested in art…so whoever is interested in art. There’s no focus on any particular group or individual.

AD: What organizations were you a part of that helped move your career?

KF: I was never a part of any organizations.

AD: In your earlier years, when you were first learning how to paint, did you have any direction from [anyone]?

KF: I give a lot of credit to my high school teacher who was my prime instructor really. I wanted to memorialize her so I mentioned her [in the DVDs mentioned earlier]. It was not techniques or only like that, it was the philosophy of art. She made me aware of the finer aspects of art. Up to high school usually we copy actors’ and actresses’ pictures, but philosophically that’s when my art became more Japanese in scope, concept, or format. I remember she always sent us to the vegetable garden to make some studies of the vegetation and I came back with a modern scene of someone in a misty graveyard [laughs]. I was still mourning my father, you know. But I wanted to memorialize her because she was important in my life. [One of] the finer aspects of life. …Ever since I was a kid [I have] challenged things. I have my own mind. [With] artwork, [it’s] the same thing. I just do what I have to do, in my own way. That’s why you have to create your own style and technique.
AD: Are you working on anything now?

KF: No, not much. I am struggling with my disabilities to begin with. I am also a writer and working on my first novel…I have a book I have not finished. I [hope] if I finish the second part it will get published.

AD: How did you get into doing scientific drawings?

KF: It’s a fantastic story. When I first started botanical illustration, I wanted to do the common flowers in Hawai‘i…these [the illustrations] are what you find generally in Hawai‘i…it [has] a uniqueness environmentally, it beautifies the island. It’s in the parkways [and] all over the place so it contributes to the beauty of Hawai‘i in a way…I worked for Encyclopaedia Britannica and that’s when we changed all the drawings. Actually, my wife started it. She drew the paramecium in a stipple technique, and the board decided to change all the drawings. I was part of it. They called me in and so I went to do scientific illustrations. I chose to do the flowers of Hawai‘i. They [were] all [drawn] from nature, not from photographs. I had to hunt for the specimens. I traveled all over and there was one hibiscus in there, it’s the pendulous one, the hanging [one], and I couldn’t find it. Then, I came across a hedge [around a house] and I knocked on the door and there was a woman who came out and I asked her if I could have a specimen. I showed her the samples of sketches I had been doing [and] then she said, “Aren’t you Melvin Fujii?” Melvin’s the name I had to assume from 6th grade to high school. And I said, “Who are you?” She said, “Don’t you remember me? I’m your schoolmate?!” [laughs] and I got a specimen from her.

END.