

Hawaii artist Douglas Ball
By Ma'ata Tukuafu
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Going through his grandmother's boxes after she had passed away, Douglas Ball found a painting of a bluebird he had done when he was seven years old. Surprised at how fresh the little painting was, he realized how his talent had been nurtured at a very tender age.

Born in Pierce, Colorado, a farming town with a population of 300, Ball grew up on a ranch and learned to appreciate nature. "I loved the effect of sunlight and the different moods it would bring," Ball said. His artistic grandmother who had married a farmer, kept a beautiful garden and did her painting "on the side." At the age of three or four years old, she taught Ball and each of his four siblings to draw, and then to eventually paint.

As a young man, his father had created beautiful paintings but chose to continue the family tradition of ranching instead. "My pops probably regretted that he hadn't kept up with his painting, and so he supported each of us, telling us to go and be whatever we wanted," Ball said. "That was really a gift."

Attending the University of Colorado, Ball took one look at the list of classes in his selected major of engineering, and immediately changed it to art. He's been painting ever since. In 1971, he started painting with oils and became interested in the Vedic culture. Spending five years in India, he researched Vedic art and really developed his painting technique. "I wanted those paintings to last hundreds of years," said Ball, who illustrated books in Indian Classics.

In the early 80's, Ball lived in Florence, Italy and began to paint "en plein aire" [on location] for the first time. "Plein air painting gives me a feeling of light, contrast and atmosphere in my work," Ball said. His love of painting the human figure as well as landscapes served him well when he joined the background department at Walt Disney Feature Animation in 1989, painting backgrounds for Disney classics; The Little Mermaid, Rescuer's Down Under, Beauty and the Beast, Hunchback of Notre Dame, Lion King and Tarzan.

Though he gained a lot of experience and was making a good living, he was "still doing someone else's stuff." "I worked 14 hours a day, six days of the week, and as artistic director [at Disney], couldn't work on my own painting," said Ball. "I wanted to increase exposure of my own art." Ball and his wife Susy traveled quite a bit, and spent three months in Moorea, French Polynesia, where he developed his appreciation of the tropical landscape. After finding land in Laupahoehoe, Ball and his wife have made the Big Island their home.

Now Ball is at the point of focusing on and creating his own art. "There's nothing more magic than sitting down and painting something that's never been done before," he said. "It's so exciting that I wake up at three in the morning and want to get to work."

Ball's paintings are found in private collections worldwide, and he has exhibited his work in many prestigious shows. His art may now be found at Lahaina Galleries at the Shops at Maunalani. Lee Cloud, an art consultant at the gallery said many artists who want to be represented by Lahaina Galleries are turned down. "Douglas Ball is the first artist in a long time to be accepted here, which speaks very highly of his work," Cloud said. "His level of skill is amazing."

Ball has built an art studio out of his home and offers art workshops to people of all skill levels. On the second and fourth Saturdays of every month from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Ball teaches figure drawing, and the cost is \$10/class. He will also be offering a plein air painting class in the future.

His artist opening with Lahaina Galleries will be on Wednesday, May 23rd from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., the public is invited to attend. For more information on Douglas Ball's workshops, call 962-6572 or visit his website at HYPERLINK "<http://www.artiststudiosonline.com>"
www.artiststudiosonline.com.