

PAINTING AND CONSERVATION: TWO GREAT PREOCCUPATIONS

MELISSA CHIMERA

PRESENTS HER ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY

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Poolside Room, Tavares Community Center, Pukalani

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On February 9, 2007 Hawaii's rare native flowers will receive top billing at Hannibal Tavares Community Center at 7 p.m. by featured painter and conservationist, Melissa Chimera. She will present slides and prints for sale of her large-scale paintings of endemic flora. Chimera will speak to a life spent in the mud building fences and brushing paint onto the canvas. The evening is an opportunity to experience flowers that were blooming on Maui before the first Polynesians arrived but today are rarely seen by those without keys to nature preserves.

Melissa Chimera, a Honolulu native, moved to Maui to work in The Nature Conservancy's Waikamoi Preserve. On the wet, eastern slopes of Haleakalā, Chimera carries on the muddy, arduous work of forestry protection. Recently, she became Haleakalā National Park's volunteer manager. She leads local residents, mainland and international volunteers caring for the resources of the park. In the midst of all this, she encounters plants today known only to botanists, and those who share her job. This is the reward, and the reason for the hard work.

"With the exception of a few scientists able to pronounce latin names, most will name ginger blossoms as uniquely Hawaiian, even though they're from South America" says Chimera. "My heart breaks every time this happens."

Through her art, Chimera connects her experiences to the rendering of these native flowers. She went to college to become a forester, while taking painting and studio classes all of her life. She sees no conflict between the two professions. Rather one is essential to the other. "As a forester, one intimately observes nature but remains scientifically detached. As a painter, you can't elevate your craft without obsessively observing the natural world, a muse which has nurtured artists for thousands of years. You need the head and the heart – in equal parts -- to succeed in either field."

Chimera's tools to convey the energy of the forest include microscopic, almost abstract detail of plant parts on large canvases. Her palette uses rich colors and broad brush strokes. She notes that if the viewer comes away asking 'what is that plant?' or 'how many are left?' then she's done her job.