

Celebrating floral art

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Among the many traditional art forms to be offered at the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts, there is one that may perhaps be one of the oldest, yet least documented, of all, namely floral art.

When one thinks of “floral art” today, visions of flowers and foliage fill a vase atop a dinner table, fronting a podium, or made into a bouquet for a blushing bride walking down an aisle. Contemporary floral art is prevalent in our lives — during Valentine’s, at weddings, Christenings and birthdays, to comfort a family during a funeral, and for many more occasions.



Palomo

However, traditional floral art has been in existence for probably thousands of years. When you see an individual wearing a mwarmwar from Chuuk, a haku from Hawaii, a nunuw from Yap, or a Pung Ra Btelul from Palau, there is a history. More importantly, there is a pre-history of this floral art tradition, carried on by cultural ceremonies and everyday practices.

Even the ancient Chamorros practiced traditional floral art. In 1673, Father Coomans wrote that women would adorn themselves with “wreaths with small flowers that look like hyacinths to place on their forehead.”

Remnants of floral art in its complete splendor cannot be found in archaeological digs, unlike spondyllus beads and shark teeth ornaments found at Naton Beach in Tumon Bay. Passages from early explorers, and lithographs and paintings from artists who depicted island life starting



in the 16th century, may be our only evidence. Fortunately, floral art still thrives in the Pacific islands, and its importance must be perpetuated for future generations to appreciate.

We encourage and invite all the participating island nations at the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts to send a floral art delegate. The floral art hut will hold demonstrations of the many floral art traditions of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia and make our community aware of the cultural significance and history of the floral art delegate’s creations. Through videos, we will show the many techniques completed after each day’s demonstrations, and information about each island’s floral art tradition.

At the 12th festival, we will also demonstrate contemporary floral art. We will focus on the environment, and provide only plant materials locally grown in Guam for the visiting delegates’ use. We will also restrict any use of floral foam, and encourage the delegates to use alternative means, such as stems and other types of eco-friendly fillers.

The floral art committee is excited to provide mini-exhibits within the Guam community during the festi-

val. We hope to partner with some venues to showcase some of the floral art creations completed at the floral art hut. It’s our way of taking the festival into the community.

It has been an enlightening journey for the floral art committee, since we were formed back in October 2014. Initial plans focused on demonstrations of contemporary floral art. During our summer workshops, we featured floral art from Guam, Yap, Chuuk, Marshall Islands, Palau and Pohnpei.

At the 2015 Guam Micronesia Island Fair, we held demonstrations as a prelude to the 12th festival. As a result of our outreach efforts, we realized that Micronesia has a rich history of floral art and now will feature traditional floral art. It will be exciting to see the islands of Oceania celebrate their floral art traditions at the festival, and help us learn and appreciate the significance of their art form.

Holding such a mammoth event as the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts is also a costly one. The floral art committee is not immune to such costs unfortunately. Although we have been graciously afforded an appropriation, we are still in need of additional funds to fulfill our mission. If you have time (and funds), please stop by The Elks Lodge in Agana Heights from 7 p.m. to midnight Nov. 13 for our first fundraiser. Entrance tickets are only \$10. We will be providing floral art demonstrations there, which make it all the more exciting!

You can email me at simeon.palomo@dca.guam.gov for more information.

Simeon Palomo chairs the Floral Arts Subcommittee for the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts.