

An Original Work of Art

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You may not know his name. You surely know his work. During the last 30 years, Dietrich Varez has created more than 250 images and hand-pulled hundreds of thousands of block prints. They are earth brown. They are Hawaiian. They are beautiful.

A native of Berlin, Varez came to Hawai'i as a young boy with his German mother and U.S. serviceman stepfather in 1947. His small kid time was spent moving around O'ahu. He went to Roosevelt High School and graduated from UH Mānoa. After two years of military service on the Mainland, Varez returned to Hawai'i and the University for a Masters degree in English. No evidence of an artistic bent. Yet. In 1964 he went to work at Ala Wai Marine. His first block-a *pua'u* in a *lo'i kalo*-was carved on linoleum scraps from the boatyard. Shades of images to come.

In 1965, he married Linda Danneberg and three years later, she had their only child, Dietrich, Jr. They also bought nine acres of land in Volcano on the Island of Hawai'i...for \$3900...sight unseen. And that is where they have been ever since. Literally leaving their smack-dab-in-the-middle-of-the-rainforest, difficult-to-get-to, built-by-Dietrich-house only "for groceries and to check the mail occasionally" in the last twenty years or so. The artists-Linda is a painter-draw much of their inspiration from their secluded surroundings. And from Pele.

Varez's lifestyle and attitude towards his work is considered downright odd in Hawai'i's mostly-glitzy art world. "I make my prints available," he says softly. And when he says "available," he means it. Although they are lovingly and individually produced and signed, they still sell for \$20 and less. Unlike other printmakers, Varez refuses to destroy his blocks. "Why should you destroy a good tool? Just for creating artificial rarity? It's not right to me." He knows he could "get" much more for them if he did. "I can contact more people this way. I like to touch a lot of people, you know." Simple. Pure.

I had heard that he often says that he doesn't care if people put his prints up with tacks in the corners as long as they put them up. Just before we spoke, I took mine-Pele's Dream of Lohi'au-out of the storage closet where it had been waiting for a frame for much longer than I care to admit. I put it up with tacks. And the first thing I did was thank him.