



A photograph of a cluttered desk with various items including books, papers, a small figurine, and a window in the background. A red letter 'M' is overlaid in the top right corner.

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"I've done a little bit of everything," Moan says, "including massage therapy, modeling for art classes, teaching art, freelance writing, housecleaning, yardwork and even projects like helping people organize and clean out their homes." She's now narrowed that to three main gigs, all related to her art and writing. She also created mail art—artistically drawn postcards—that she offers for sale, noting that "it's nice to have a happy mailbox." On a self-dare, she created Poetry in Motion, setting up on a street corner with her 1959 Olivetti typewriter, offering on-the-spot poetry to anyone in need—whether celebrating a birthday, anniversary, graduation, or other special occasion. "I had no idea if it would work," she says, "But the thing modeling for art classes taught me is that, when you're standing there in front of a classroom with nothing on, you're very vulnerable but also very confident, because everyone sees everything and there's nothing to hide." It worked, and now she's setting up that typewriter at parties across the island, creating on-demand party poetry for anyone in need.

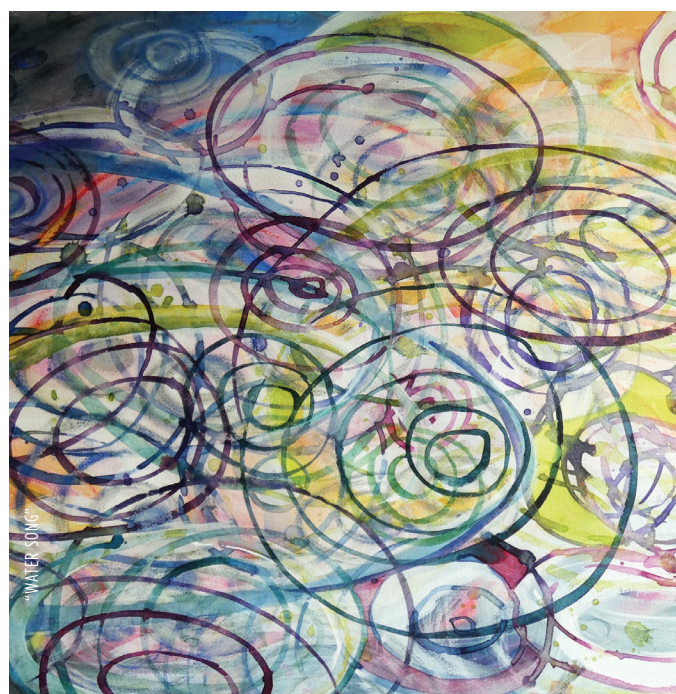
ARTIST TAMARA MOAN WORKING IN HER BEACHFRONT HOME STUDIO.

"I was drawn to art, and mom was very encouraging of that with my brother and me," Moan says. "She always created a space in our home where we could make art, a space we didn't have to clean up." Reading came a bit later for Moan, which worried her mother. Her first-grade teacher counseled mom to be patient, pointing out that Moan was communicating perfectly well with her art, and that when she realized words were also art, she'd pick it right up. As expected, the first-grade teacher was right.

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At 50, Moan realized her dream of seeing the world a bit at a time might take too long, so she and her husband went big: they sold their cars, got rid of possessions, stored the rest and took off to bike around the world for a year. "The trip was fabulous, including the really bad parts," she says. In Australia, after biking the east coast of the country, she suffered a deep vein thrombosis that sidelined them, and then once back on the bike, she took a tumble and tore her meniscus. Many might have come home, but not them. She underwent surgery in Bangkok to repair the knee, and after healing, they shipped the bikes home and continued around the world. They meandered through Southeast Asia, South Africa, Namibia, Istanbul, Israel (for Passover no less), Switzerland, Prague, Vienna, and as the finale, a bike ride down the Danube, from Vienna to Budapest.

PHOTOS: COURTESY TAMARA MOAN





Now, Moan and her husband are settled into the oldest beach cottage in Kailua, a 1928 beachfront home on the same lane her mother grew up on. “It’s a dream come true,” she says of living there, following her mother’s footsteps. And, of course, she has her art studio; a light-filled space with windows on three sides, facing the beach, with her easel, work table, lauhala weaving, and a corner to read and write. It’s just like the space her mom created—a space that doesn’t need cleaning up, where art comes to life. 🐦

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Art in the Time of COVID

When COVID hit, Moan turned to her art to process the world around her. “The first couple of months, there were a few days a week when I couldn’t focus, I just wandered aimlessly around,” she says, “especially the week George Floyd was killed—all I could do was clean my house.”

But the artistic wheels were still turning. She turned to a small group of fellow visual artists and another group of writers, and they launched their COVID projects.

With few supplies and limited ability to get new ones, Moan pulled out some older works, ones that perhaps hadn’t aged as she’d wanted, and she cut each one up into four 12-by-12-inch squares and reimagined the work. “I said goodbye to the original image, and then reordered the pieces,” she says, “and then added layers and changes, and then did it again.” Her final piece was perhaps her favorite, a collage created on top of an old piece. “You could see the layers underneath, the old layers of my life under the new layers of my life,” she says.

With her writing group, she returned to poetry and journaling every day, literally recording the pandemic day by day, reflecting case numbers, her emotional state, and other thoughts. She thought it would be a couple of months, so she chose a notebook accordingly. She’s since added more notebooks. “Looking back at the journals now, especially the early days, I realize I’ve forgotten how weird and dark those days were,” she says.

She and her two groups—writing and visual arts—all report they churned out more work in the first three COVID months than they’ve done in previous years. “My art has been a great source of solace during COVID,” she says. Her art and Kailua Beach—that’s what’s gotten her through. 🐦

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