

Children's Liturgical Art Wins Praise

By JEAN CHARLOT

For most of us, the term "liturgical art" projects an image dignified but slightly boring. While other forms of our 20th century art have gamboled freely through new pastures, liturgical art has been sulking rather in a corner.

Wrapped in pharisee grandeur, it still feeds on the dehydrated styles of old, be they neo-Gothic, or pseudo-

Byzantine. Even typesetters, when they deal with church news, instinctively favor black letter Gothic.

The Liturgical Art Exhibition at Nuuanu Sacred Hearts Convent totally breaks with the expected. Christ said, "Let the little children come to me."

Here they flock fearlessly to Him, and to His Mother, and to His saints. With pen, pencil, colored chalks, water

colors, gouaches, oils, mosaics, clay and needlework, also wire sculpture, paper sculpture, thread sculpture, mobiles and stabiles, they express their delight.

These children, all unknowingly, tackle the very same problems that the earliest of Christian artists had attempted to solve centuries ago when they decorated the Roman catacombs.

Symbolism enriches the choice of subjects. Some expected, such as the dove and the lamb, the fish, the vine and the Wheat.

Other symbols are as valid as they are new: a butterfly emerging from his chrysalis stands for the Resurrection. And so does the chick pecking its way out of its shell.

A pair of dice acquire symbolical meaning, since the Roman soldiers shoot craps on a drumhead for Christ's seamless robe. Even a piece of pop art, a cardboard apple half-bit, reminds us of Mother Eve and of the Garden of Eden.

Saints there are, dolls amorously clothed by little hands that know how to play with dolls. There is a St. Martin of Porres, hands and face black as black can be, clothed in snow-white Dominican robes.

There is a St. Tekakwitha, a canonized American Indian girl, walnut brown all over, a welcome contrast to the piggy-pink complexion of so many plaster saints that still haunt our altars.

A St. Francis of Assisi, molded from head to foot with coconut husks, is of the texture and color that clothes Lady Poverty in Sassetta's portrait of the saint.

Indeed, for artists and clerics alike, there is much

to marvel at and to ponder about in this show. The pall of assumed holiness that disguises so much of our sacred art is rent aside, fresh air enters the Holy of Holies.

To give permanence to the lesson, could not a chapel be built and consecrated, to be entirely decorated by children? Regardless of age, those who would go there to pray could hardly fail to catch the point: a pure heart and a joyful mind are essential ingredients of true sacred art.