

Art Trend Toward Nature

By JEAN CHARLOT

A one-man show by Willson Stamper opened yesterday at Gima Galleries. It runs until August 29. Stamper is an artist of museum

caliber and, as a teacher, steered a young flock of Island painters.

To understand the quality of the present showing, one would do well to pay a visit

to the Academy of Arts for a look at his earlier work, such as "Perfume Counter," in the Academy's permanent collection. Stamper personifies in his evolution the new trend that stands in contrast to what is usually referred to as "modern art."

Early in our century, distortion was an indispensable ingredient of art. Through the means of violent distortions, master painters vented their passions. A flock of lesser men followed suit, docilely fitting two eyes on one side of a nose, instead of one on each side. "Art is not nature" was their slogan.

Then came another revolution. Abstraction became the mouthpiece for an inner world said to be incompatible with the objective world. Naturally, when abstraction entered the stage, distortion flew out of the window. For how could one distort an abstraction!

Today, we enter a third phase of 20th century art. The artist in the vanguard, fatigued by previous orgies of distortion and abstraction, opens his eyes on the outer world. To his surprise, he finds it far from repulsive a sight. In fact, that outer world, up to then so pitilessly maligned and belittled, is discovered to be both complex and beautiful.

This new school feels no qualms in tying again nature and art, and no loss of freedom in respecting the most minute variations of a scene seen. The resulting reflection on canvas of the objective world cannot fail to blend with the nuances of that other inner world that the artist would not be able to annul, even if he wished to do so.

Critics and dealers alike deplore the change and wish that art, the modern art they knew, would stay put. But art is made by artists, not by critics or dealers, and artists are a restless breed that forever refuses to stay put.

Stamper's landscapes are crisply illustrative of the new trend—sharp, precise, never tampering with what his eye saw. His figure painting is not as strongly motivated as the landscapes. His models are dreamed of, rather than seen.

A shimmer of pleasant hues, a veneer of poetry, veils what deeper human values undoubtedly existed in the sitters. It would be interesting to see what would happen if he applied to figure painting the same implacable vision that sharpens and deepens his landscapes.