



By JEAN
CHARLOT

ART

Profundity with flowers

Sponsored by the Cherry Blossom Festival, the watercolors of Charles Higa, at the Contemporary Arts Center, are admirably chosen to give a profound meaning to the occasion.

Nurtured as it is by commercial firms and featuring the crowning of a beauty queen, the festival could easily transform itself into one more "happy moment."

One would lose sight of the deep ethnical roots that give it a flavor far different from other festivals recently sprung from the fertile mind of well-meaning public relations men.

Even in Japan, the viewing of cherry blossoms assumes overtones of folksy jollity. There also, it is the artist that jealously keeps alive its finer meaning.

Eastern landscapes

In Eastern art, landscape painting is an exercise in emptying oneself of self; an exercise in relating man to nature, and in finding man an estimable fellow, but far from being the king of creation, either as regards beauty or as regards power.

Great Oriental masters have said as much when they were erecting with brush and ink lofty peaks and cliffs, ruggedly solid or softened by rising mists. If man is there at all—as stated by a master painter of long ago—man should appear of the size of a chick-pea.

If from immense panoramas we turn to the sight of small things, similar wonders force man to recede into awe.

The textured petal of a single cherry blossom, its blushing rosy hue, may put to shame the close-grained beauty of a lovely woman.

His is a modern idiom

Higa uses a modern idiom unaffected by the style of ancient Oriental masters. Nevertheless he retells the same truths, using a similar subject matter. The panoramic vistas and the loving attention paid to the very small are there.

In "Seedlings," one may see sprouting seeds, but also twirling and dividing nebulae in deep space.

The visible and the invisible melt and merge. We pass from the familiar sight of sky and sun and sea to the unfamiliar one of subterranean motion, from seeds sprouting to lava flows rising.

"Beginning," "Growth,"

"Exit," thus make visible the invisible.

Other works are closer to traditional landscape, at least in their subject matter.

A statement about a tree

"The Banyan" is a statement about a tree. We see its canopy of foliage and its aerial roots. And yet the dominant notion is a sense of its antiquity, pitted against the span of a human life. Here again the picture reduces the onlooker to the size of a chick-pea.

Soft in outlines and charming in hues, Higa's watercolors hide hard truths under their gentle exterior. They bring us close to the inner meaning, too often lost from sight, of the viewing of the cherry blossoms.

Collages at the library

Joseph Van Ramp is showing his collages at the Hawaii State Library. Previously I had singled out his drawings in group shows, delicate in form and forceful in content.

His collages are, physically, an agglomeration of disparate materials, all of them worthless refuse stuff. Half a century ago, Kurt Schwitters had used this technique in his now famous "merz" paintings.

Analyzing the components one finds: newspaper scraps, burnt leather, airline tags, whisky labels, bus transfers, marbled paper, corrugated cardboard, playing cards, pottery shards, perforated tape, Chinese tea wrappings, gold foil and what seems a fragment of a barrel stave.

Why is it art?

How it happens that all this has been truly transformed into art, surely not even the artist knows. As were the drawings, the collages are discreet, delicate,

of an almost morbid shyness. Beauty is there, as it was in the drawings.

Perhaps the mystery of art is more forcefully advanced in such unorthodox media than when the artist uses the more acceptable oil paint.

One is apt to forget that ground pigments, oil, turpentine, a piece of linen and brushes made of pig's bristles are a no less astonishing paraphernalia than is collage, to be transformed into spiritual meaning and esthetic harmonies.

Calendar of events

Honolulu Printmakers, 38th annual show, Church of the Crossroads Gallery, 1212 University Avenue, through March 31.

Collages by Joseph Van Ramp, Hawaii State Library patio, through April 11.

Hawaii Handweavers Hui, Unitarian Church Gallery, 2500 Pali Highway, through March.

Gima's Art Gallery: Mendoza, through March 26; Stephen Longstreet, drawings, prints and collages, March 27 to April 9.

Windward Artist's Guild annual show, co-sponsored by the Ala Moana Association, Ala Moana Center, March 28 to April 9.

Watercolors by Charles Higa, Cherry Blossom Festival Art Exhibition, Contemporary Arts Center, News Building. (Reviewed here.)

Faculty show, University of Hawaii Art Department, George Hall Gallery, through March.

Academy of Arts: Serigraphs and color lithographs by Marc Chagall and Josef Albers.

Questions answered

Q—Is the quality of illumination possible in a painting by the artist simply paying attention to the light and dark patterns? Would you use Rembrandt and Beckmann in your examples?—Seymour Salevy

A—Illumination creates

form, an illusion of the third dimension on the flat surface of the painting. Graphic artists, etchers and lithographers deal in values from black to white to achieve this end.

Painters divide into "graphic" painters and "painterly" painters.

George Rouault, a very great master, is preeminently a graphic artist, even in his paintings.

Matisse, a painterly painter, replaces value contrasts by color contrasts, minimizing dark and light in favor of opposites.

An artist's vocabulary is a loose one. The only man who attempted to tighten these definitions is Cezanne.

He called the black-to-white rounding out of a form "modeling" and reserved the term "modulation" for the same illusion when it is produced mostly through color.

Q—Do you know of any Island sites where one can produce "rubblings" of gravestones, monuments, carvings, et cetera?

A—Indeed our Islands are rich in materials fit for "rubblings." Petroglyphs, the ancient carvings on rocks, lend themselves perfectly to this technique.

On Oahu, two clusters of petroglyphs exist in Nuuanu, figures of dogs and humans. Kenneth Emory and others are now mapping the many petroglyphs on Hawaii. In a single site, they exceed 14,000.

Halley Cox is preparing a book to be published by the Bishop Museum, that will include the petroglyph sites maps.

I use unprimed muslin and lead pencil, and ink the design afterwards.

As the Oahu petroglyphs are protected by the Bishop Museum, you cannot get at them without permission and a key.

News and questions about art may be mailed to: Jean Charlot, Art Department, University of Hawaii, Honolulu 96822.



"The Banyan" by Charles Higa