

ART

By JEAN
CHARLOT



An art exhibit in News Building

The 18th Annual Exhibition of the Hawaii Painters and Sculptors League will open tomorrow at the Contemporary Arts Center in the News Building.

The League found itself for a while without a roof over its collective head. It is a relief then, and a pleasure, to see the works installed in such a spacious and pleasant gallery.

It is a juried show, hung most decorously. It features, as is to be expected nowadays, a majority of abstractions.

The very unity of the show raises an awkward question. Are we so proud, are we so sure of our taste that paintings that speak the language of yesterday should be sidetracked to the limbo of rejection for the sake of unity?

Something missing from this show

I miss the work of seasoned League members, excellent craftsmen, even though not addicts of today's esthetic "Au go-go."

When is an abstract not abstract is painlessly illustrated by comparing two excellent paintings, Tadashi Sato's "Reflections," and Louis Pohl's "The Reef."

Both artists chose as their theme the shallows at the edge of the sea and distorted images of submerged rocks.

Artfully, Sato keeps to a gamut of grays and refuses a clue to help the onlooker. He presents us with one more of his famed abstractions, tailored to fit sophisticates.

Red fish in blue depths

Louis Pohl refuses to play this game of invisibility. He introduces in his picture small fishes, red ones, that swim unconcernedly in the depths of his blue picture. Gently human, Pohl chooses to demote what would otherwise be an abstraction to the

status of a seascape.

Madge Tennent is represented by one of her Hawaiian women, monolithic, suggesting the weight of stone and the texture of flesh.

Edward Stasack's "Hero No. 2" is part of a series. The hero's features are delicately faceted, as if by the patient brush of a 15th century Flemish master. His heroism is one that deals with meekness and holiness. An indistinct halo hovers in the background.

A surprise by Juanita Vitousek

For me, the surprise of the show is Juanita Vitousek's "Church—Russia." It marks one of these rare moments in the life of an artist when problems of style, of composition, of fashion, are all thrown to the winds because of an inexorable inner pressure to state what one has seen, what one has felt and

sorrowed about.

It is a small-format watercolor, unassuming and easy to bypass in such a large and colorful group show. It represents the dark corner of a desolate stone architecture. A lonely charwoman, with mop and bucket, attempts the impossible task of cleaning acres of flagstones.

An old style is resurrected

To clearly state what she had to say, the artist went back to a style discarded so long ago that the spectator experiences a shock at the impact. It parallels the art of the 19th century French master, Daumier. He too loved to portray in similarly graded values the lowbrows of his day, the laundress, the female street cleaner, the charwoman.

Though hardly liable to be endorsed by Soviet dictators of taste who insist on an art

of social consciousness, "Church—Russia" is both an excellent picture and a true social document.

Works by Doi and Baldwin

This year, the show features the work of two members lost to us this year, Harry Baldwin and Isami Doi.

The heart of the show, so to speak, is two of their pictures, hung on a recessed wall converted into a sort of unassuming shrine.

Be it by plan or by accident, these paintings complement each other impressively.

Baldwin's "Existentialist" deals with the human body. It hovers between an X-ray and an anatomical chart. Perceived through the louvres of the ribs, man's inner organs are naively colored in reds and blues that suggest the blatant innocence of a coloring book.

Sorrow over the inevitable

The dramatically lighted features of the model underline man's sorrow as he realizes the perishable nature of his inner cargo.

Doi's painting, "Arborescent," deals with man also, but man depurated and spiritualized. Doi frees, as it were, Baldwin's earth man from his body, proposes an upwards escape. In Doi's painting, a green growth freely spreads over red ground. Taken literally, it is a promise to spring. Taken symbolically, it visualizes man's vertical upsurge, victorious over the lethal pull of gravity.

Confronted with these two paintings, one feels a sense of awe at the never solved mystery of why the artist may enter his apotheosis only through the gates of death.



The surprise of the show: "Church—Russia" by Juanita Vitousek