

ART

By **JEAN CHARLOT**



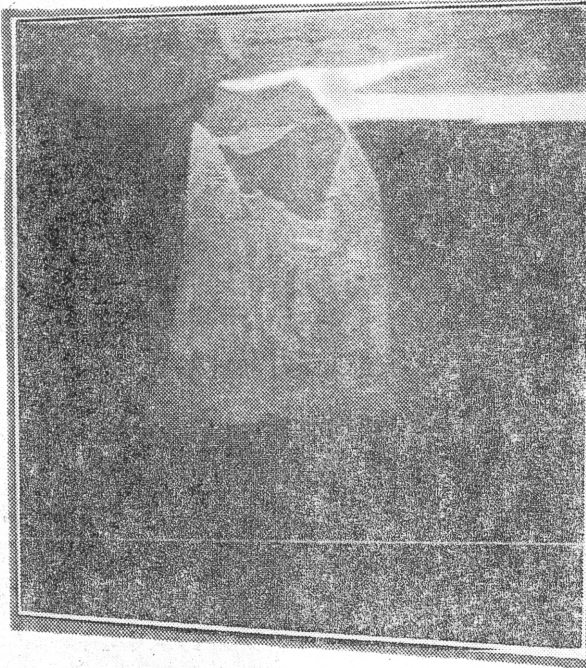
A somber one-man show

A one-man show by James Rosen opens today at Gima's Art Gallery. All works are of mural size and all are keyed to somberness. His is a strong and a unified personality.

In our time when most well behaved pictures are abstractions, one would tend to label Rosen's work as abstract.

It is only by following the clues his earlier work offers that one realizes these are not abstractions in the usual sense, meaning a pictorial outpouring of the inner self.

The paintings record instead the violent impact that Hawaii made on the newcomer. Rosen was hit by the beauty of our cliffs, coves and palis. However it is not in his nature to dwell on the surface of things.



"Nuuanu Pali"

The temptation of bright color

Our strong sunlight has tempted many a painter to duplicate the blues of sky and ocean, and to use as pleasant a range of colors as are in fact the colors of our Paradise.

Rosen's communion with nature goes beyond the visual delight. An early work, "Quiet Landscape," was painted before he came to

Hawaii. It stresses a soothing horizontal. Though subdued, its sky glows, and lights in turn the spherical bulk of trees symmetrically arranged.

"Nuuanu Pali" is a next step. The foreground cliff is darkly silhouetted. Between it and the far-off pali there is a pocket of space, a valley or cove. Cloud forms open to reveal a small area of rose sky.

One cannot say if the scene is set at night or in the day. The disciplined range of values, the limited range of colors, makes it close to impossible to give an idea of the richness of this work through a newspaper half-tone reproduction. I chanced it anyhow.

"Nuuanu Pali" is our last visual clue to what the other paintings are about. Green-blue on blue-green, their simplified forms have lost both weight and plumb.

They could be the hesitant beginnings of an uncertain alphabet, more prehistoric in flavor than contemporary.

Taking our cue from "Nuuanu Pali" we realize that these are again earth forms clothed in vegetation. But the all-over glaucous darkness that engulfs them is nearly subterranean.

Indications of the primeval

Rather than molding themselves on the earth's surface, the symbols conjure the geological upwards push that created the palis, the downward strokes that eroded deep furrows in their flanks.

tent of his "landscapes," Rosen has recourse to the Hawaiian language for his titles. His works have more than a casual affinity with the viewpoint of ancient Hawaiians.

These remote ancestors were hardly conscious that they lived in a visual paradise. They were however, as is Rosen, very conscious of what superhuman forces had floated over ocean level this group of islands that was the whole world for them.

Some surprises await him

Undoubtedly, Rosen will get acquainted in time with Hawaiian epics. These have in store some surprises for him.

The title of the Hawaiian Genesis is Kumulipo. It is a contraction of Kumu uli po that may be paraphrased, however weakly, as "In the beginning there was the dark blue of the night."

It is in the dark blue of the night that the gods manipulated this earth, raised its cliffs, sank its valleys, folded in serried folds its flanks.

It is in that same dark blue of the night that Rosen constructs images not far different from those that the ancients carved on boulders and in caves. Perhaps here the artist's behavior may be of help to Hawaiian archeologists.

Recognition pleases; mystery displeases

The student of petroglyphs applauds when he recognizes the image of a man or of a dog. These are part of his own visual experience. He grows surly, however, when he fails to decipher other images that look like nothing he knows.

Such unidentified images are as plentiful in prehistoric Europe as they are in ancient Hawaii. They are far from meaningless.

A lesson may be learned from the present show. Since prehistoric times artists have created images that record the impact of nature rather than nature's objective forms.

forms are in no way intended as writing. If two worlds were never meant to meet, rather than East and West I would choose the world of words and the world of images.

And that makes task of the art critic a rather problematic avocation.

Dr. Charlot welcomes questions from readers on all aspects of art. Write to: Jean Charlot, Star-Bulletin, Box 3080, Honolulu 96802.

A question for a retiring professor

Q—Now that you are graduating your last batch of art students at the University of Hawaii, would you care to comment on some of the changes you have seen in the teaching of art, locally, nationally and world wide?

A—From my previous answers to questions, it is obvious that I do not pretend to universal knowledge. To answer, I fall upon my own experience rather than to have recourse to encyclopedias.

Given this premise, the only answer I can give is bound to be more national than world wide, and even

A school without credits, graduation

My first teaching was at the Art Students League in New York. It is a school entirely without academic paraphernalia, without graduation or credits. Only practicing artists go to the League. Its faculty is composed of practicing artists.

It was difficult for me to adjust to regular colleges. I remember an incident that illustrates the different type of student one finds there.

I was painting in my combination studio-office with my door open, and two fledgling co-eds had been craning their necks from outside to better see the proceedings.

I politely invited them in. They didn't budge. I said "You are interested in art." They answered as unanimously as a pair of swans on a dive: "No, but we have to take it, worst luck!"

Many chores but few workers

In Hawaii, I pretty much became a jack of all trades, as were also my colleagues when the number of our faculty members did not exceed the fingers on one hand.

The studio course I preferred was life drawing, not for the more obvious reasons. I corrected student drawings by referring them

After a while I became conscious of a resistance that grew to opposition at times.

Our chairman received a complaint that my corrections were all about trifling matters entirely irrelevant to art, such as seeing to it that each foot drawn had no more and no less than five toes.

To take nature out of the game of art and still make a game of it seems as impossible to me as to take one of the three ivory balls out and still have a game of billiards.

As studio art grew more abstract, art became a dialogue between the art student and his id or ego. To introduce my criticism between these two prideful selves was as hazardous as sticking one's finger between the tree trunk and the bark.

He preferred to switch

I switched to lecture classes on the history of art.

I soon recaptured a sense of usefulness. It was good to be able to present the old masters as they were, not as they are supposed to be.

Conservatives call upon them as witnesses to the madness of contemporary art. As did the witch of Endor, they conjure a procession of dead men.

Dressed in velvet and with

flowing over their pigment-loaded palette, their brush pointed at contemporary doings, they deliver their maledictions.

These vicious fellows are strawmen propped up to support a thesis that has no substance in fact.

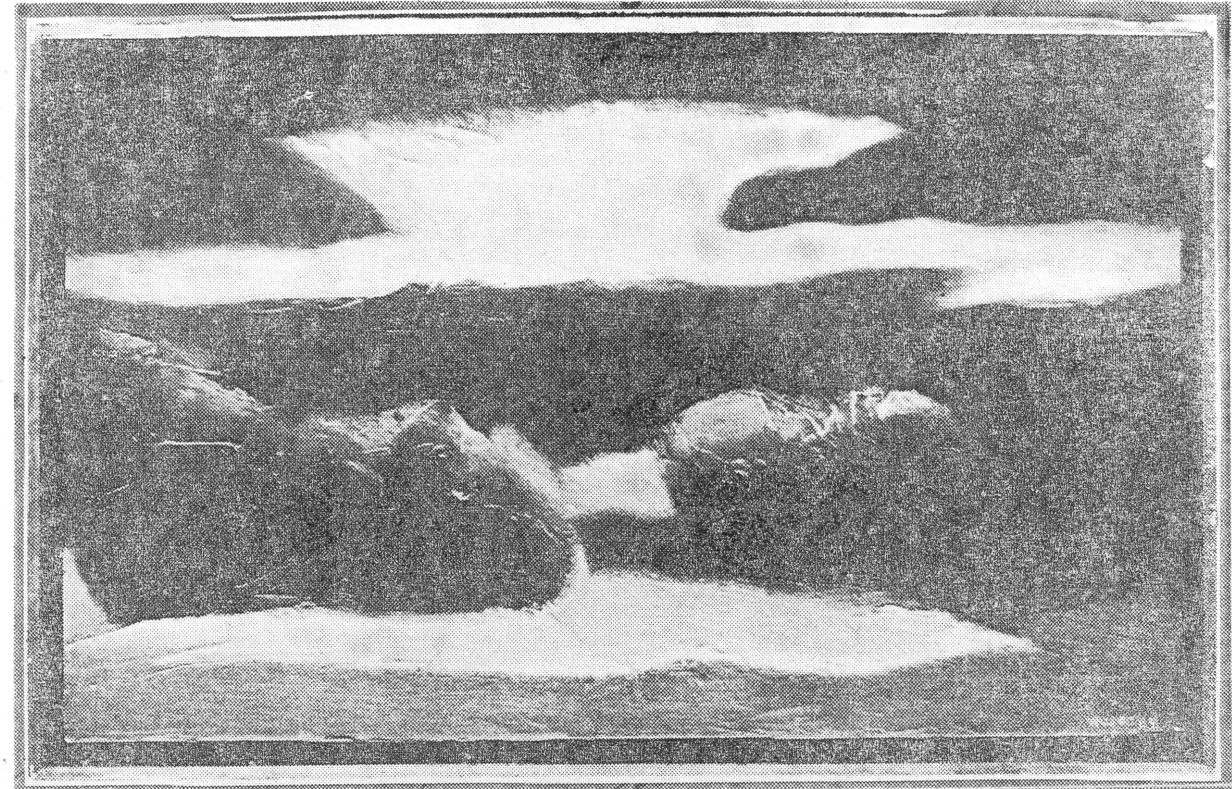
If the old masters are remembered it is because they themselves are revolutionaries and more often than not, young revolutionaries. A Gericault dies in his thirties. A Masaccio dies in his twenties.

Old masters of the future

My classes of history of art, by stressing this point of view, may have released some among my students from what shackles were in their way to becoming—in their turn and in time—old masters.

As I lectured, slides of ancient masterpieces were projected on the screen.

An ex-student, on a tour of Europe, reported that everywhere she went to look at art, were it in the Louvre in Paris, the National Gallery in London, or the Uffizi in Florence, there stood between her and the masterpieces a little man armed with a long pointer. He was always the same. He gesticulated and mouthed words, even though no sound was



"Quiet Landscape"