

ART

By JEAN CHARLOT



A guest aboard the Kamehameha

Last week I cruised most of a day on board the U.S.S. Kamehameha, our nuclear-propelled, missile-loaded submarine.

My own tenuous tie with the boat—no submariner refers to his craft as a ship—was that I had painted a portrait of Kamehameha, after Choris.

The portrait was a launching gift from the Hui Moku 'Aina o Hawai'i ma Wai-mekona, the Hawaii State Society of Washington, D.C.

A few rambling thoughts follow, brought about by the unusual occasion.

Artists just can't fight

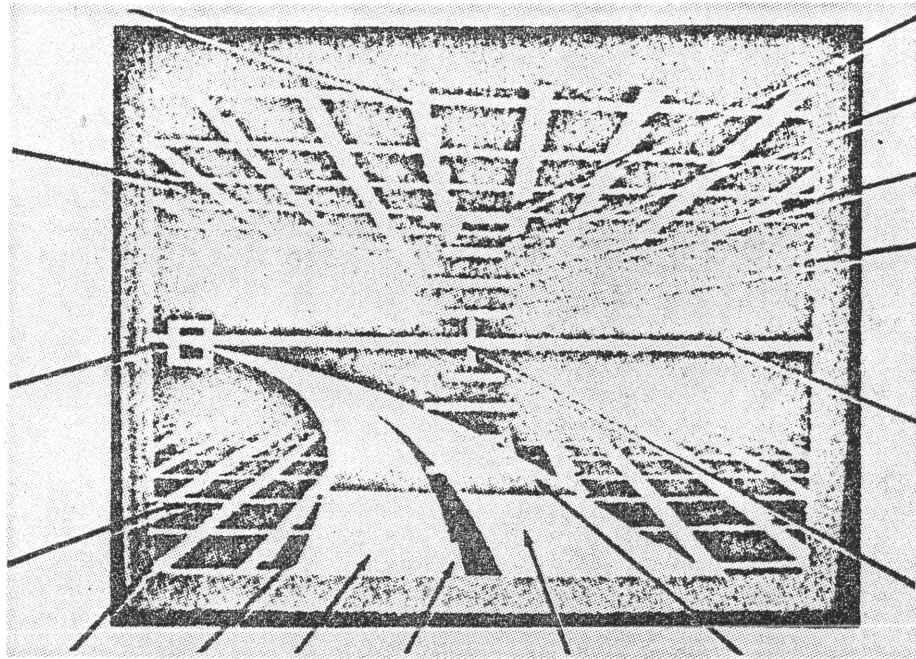
Born artists are notoriously not of the fighting type. Already in prehistory the great hunter and the great artist were at odds. The hunter owned by right of might a choice bit of real estate, the sunlit entrance to the cave.

The artist, not much of a provider and even more inane at feats of war, lived, not by choice, at the back of the cave. More often than not, his airless and lightless "studio" was set where walls and ceiling funneled into a cul-de-sac.

They worked lying down

Ancient paintings of bisons and of mammoths are often discovered in impossibly remote cave corners, where one can neither sit nor stand.

Taking hold of this fact, prehistorians claim it as proof that magic was the



UNDERSEA PANORAMA—This is a reproduction of a graph from a nuclear submarine's TV screen which shows what's ahead as the sub is under way.

purpose of the caveman's art.

In a way, magic there was. The fame of hunters and warriors disintegrated into dust milleniums ago.

Prehistoric art remains today as vivid a statement of man's greatness as when it had just been painted.

However, art is not the exclusive apanage of artists. So ingrained is art in human nature that Cezanne could state — truthfully if inelegantly — that art exudes from man as naturally as scum oozes from a snail.

The development of weaponry

Concurrently with cave painting, prehistory knew yet another kind of art, namely machine art.

Hunters and warriors depended on brute strength. They depended also on men with cool heads. In our day, we call them scientists.

Experimenting with chipped flints, these egg-heads, trained at rational thinking, increased the efficiency of the primitive weapons.

Up to then, the innocent savage picked up a stone from the ground and flung it

straight at his opponent.

Now he found himself helpless against blades chipped scientifically and tied to the tip of aerodynamic spear shafts.

Prehistory, too, boasted of its super-weapons!

Blades, paintings things of beauty

These stone blades, built for efficiency, have survived. As are the cave paintings, but in a more abstract way, they, too, are things of beauty.

Caveman and modern man are two of a kind. Art is still with us. War is still with us.

As in prehistory, the fine arts exist side by side with machine art.

The day I cruised on board the Kamehameha proved to be an intriguing esthetic experience.

Of the statistics so graciously and patiently volunteered by our hosts I understood little. But I was all eyes.

An undersea metal jungle

These few hours undersea were lived in the midst of a

jungle of metallic sculptures.

Some were beautiful because of their simplicity, as is beautiful Brancusi's "Bird in Flight."

Others reminded me of totem poles packed, or so it seemed, with bristling magic.

Some, to my untrained eye, looked like the metal constructions that Tinguely animates, assigning them the task of destroying themselves.

Robot eyes, green, red or yellow, winked at us as we crossed their path. Instrument boards offered endless visual combinations, pinpoints of light arranging and rearranging themselves into minute transitory constellations.

How the submarine is steered

Though computers do most of the thinking, steering the boat remains a manual operation. The pilot, his hand at the wheel, sits facing an unorthodox TV screen.

Inside the hermetically sealed steel fish, this screen

is the one window that opens onto the deep.

What it reveals lacks in picturesqueness. It is the opposite of Cousteau's "Silent World." There are no living corals, no swirling schools of fish, no writhing octopuses to be seen.

What is shown on that screen is an "op" movie, a conceptual landscape. It features convergent perspective lines. Their vanishing point pinpoints the set goal.

Much like a land speedway

Cruising at shallow depths, the artificial panorama looks much like a speedway situated on land, stretching along an endless, cactus-less Arizona desert.

As the dive deepens, another set of perspective lines appear. They fill the upper part of the screen. They suggest a low coffered ceiling that spreads in depth unto infinity.

These moving, ever changing, geometric abstracts intrigued me. They brought to mind other perspective diagrams drawn in the early fifteenth century.

Masters like Paolo Uccello despised the variegated sights of objective nature. They rated above beauty similar bare schemas of convergent lines. These masters were the men who discovered the laws of perspective.

Within the hull, the threat of doom

A painter's visual awareness forever stresses form over function. In this one case, however, beautiful form could not altogether hide the threat of doom held dormant inside the sleek hull.

Come Doomsday, the final one, the one that shall not be man-made, the dead will rise at the clarion call.

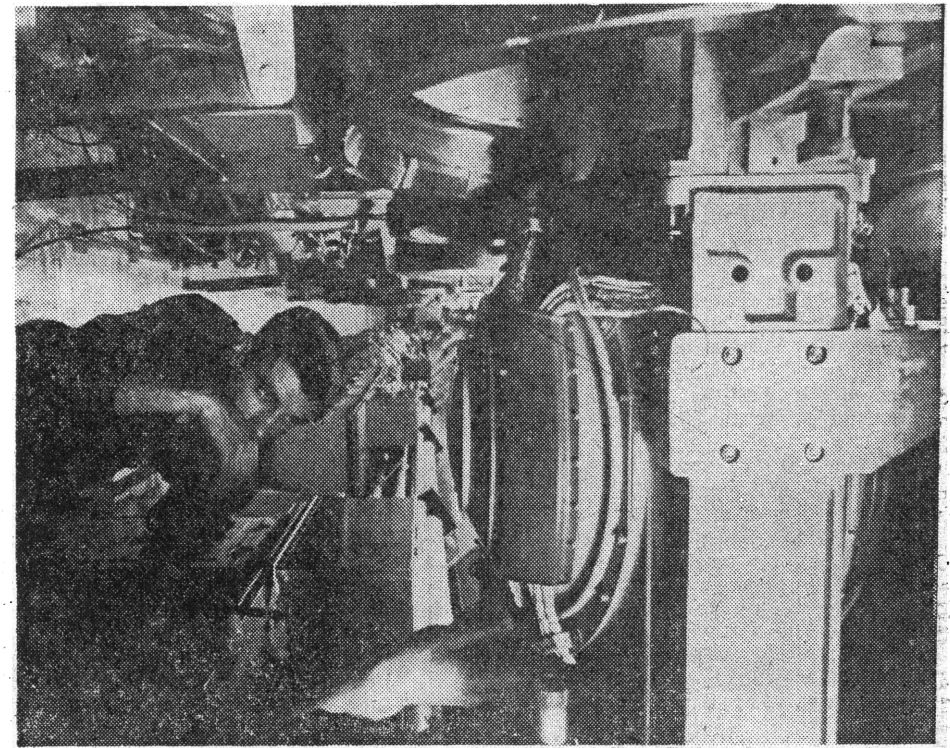
I reckon that one among them, as absentminded as he is single minded, may forget the obvious theological implications.

The resurrected artist will idly scan the spectacle. He will admire the elongated bodies of the angels' trumpets, the graceful flaring of the trumpets' lips, their brassy shiny texture.

Such non-essentials may very well prove his first concern.

Awesomeness, for an instant will be held in abeyance in favor of form.

As it happened to me last week, on board the Kamehameha!



WAR GOD?—Artist Jean Charlot cruised aboard the nuclear submarine Kamehameha last week. He was given this photograph of another Polaris sub, the Ethan Allen, and his experienced eye immediately found a graven image among the machinery. The crewmen were changing the guidance capsule in the missile inside its launching tube when the picture was taken.