

ART

By **JEAN CHARLOT**



Step right up! See real culture!

At the 50th State Fair in Kapiolani Park the Honolulu Jaycees are putting on a jolly good show.

You can get happy and queasy in so many styles: riding merry-go-rounds that go round and round. Lifted by Ferris wheels up to dizzying heights! Riding astride a new-fangled affair that drives you at crazy speeds and at ever varying slants!

All kinds of tents house all kinds of things. The teen tent features a top "rock" band. An African safari tent exhibits stuffed big game. And there is Mad Mouse and hot malasadas. Even a bikini contest!

Last but not least from my narrow point of view, a Cultural Exhibit displays art: photographs, paintings and sculptures.

A very moving art exhibition

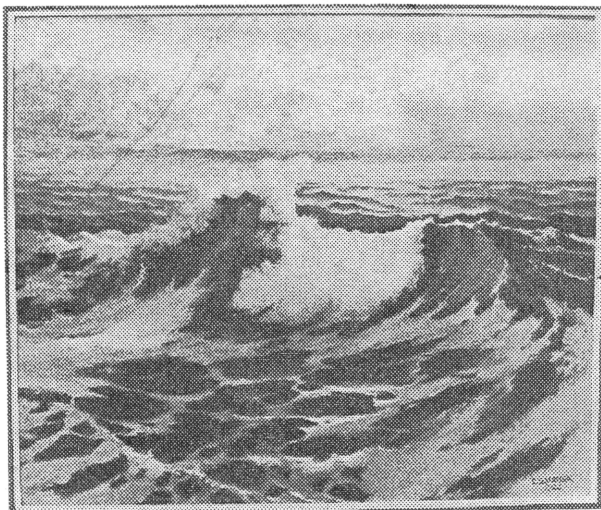
Of itself, this impermanent museum is an attractive affair. Its peaked canvas roof is held high by diagonal poles. Its intermittent canvas "walls" are garishly striped in clashing reds and yellows.

The canvas takes in the wind like a catamaran sail, and flaps from concave to convex with a great show of nautical theatrics, though there is no sea and nowhere to go!

Somehow this architecture in motion seems to fit to perfection the theme of the art display. This year, it is "Aquatic Hawaii."

Malraux had a term for it

Andre Malraux coined a needed expression when he spoke of "a museum without walls." The term refers to new methods of color reproduction. Original masterpieces are scattered the world over. Nevertheless, technical printing progress allows us to savor side by side a Turner from the Lon-



Charles S. Marek's "Windward Breaker"

don National Gallery, a Manet from the Louvre and a Goya from the Prado.

The term "museum without walls" implies also a criticism of a certain concept of what a museum should be. Viewed from outside, too often does it look like an impregnable fortress.

To reach the exhibits, the visitor ascends an impressive and fatiguing flight of stairs. The next hurdle may be a row of Greek columns, be they Doric or Corinthian.

Body and soul rise to new heights

All this antiquated and awesome paraphernalia is meant to mentally raise the outsider to the level of art. It is also a heavy hint that all great art is a thing of the past, that great artists never again are to be born.

The people of Hawaii may thank the insight and the humility of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke who gave Honolulu its art museum. Our Academy of Arts is free of the forbidding look that Andre Malraux objects to.

Nevertheless, the Honolulu Academy, built for permanence, can hardly enjoy the total freedom from awesomeness that is the happy lot of the cultural tent, set as it is in the midst of the bustling State Fair.

among others attracted me. Its canvas roof was striped orange and red. Its canvas walls clashed blues against yellows. In front of it a small merry-go-round was in motion. Its mushroom-shaped roof alternated delicate mauves and soiled whites.

A masterpiece of non-art

This man-made landscape was an "op" masterpiece. It took will power to realize that this was not art at all. Proof of it: It happened outside the cultural tent!

The picture show is a non-juried exhibit. Non-juried shows play a healthy role in a community. In Paris and in New York, artists fought hard for non-juried shows.

That was of course long ago, when there was a dictatorship of art on the part of academies and when the reigning academic taste was worth fighting against.

Still today, freedom is an asset. Should this be a juried show, it would doubtless prove a more professional affair. It would also be the poorer for it.

Things of doubtful taste and things of doubtful skill have a charm all their own. The pride of achievement

Here, we literally have a museum without walls.

The art-lover may switch at will, with a slight turn of the head, from sculpture to a sight of the churning crowds, from oil paintings to carnival wheels in motion.

To tell the truth, in this museum without walls even an art-lover may get confused. Having entered the cultural exhibit on tiptoe to assimilate its culture, I found my eyes straying guiltily towards outside sights.

Especially a big tent

that grips the Sunday painter as he signs his paintings communicates itself to the onlooker, even if he is an art critic!

However hesitantly expressed, total sincerity surprises and pleases.

The message is sharp and clear

Look at Wai Tuck Lo's "Until We Meet Again." A red lei has been cast on a blue sea. It anchors itself uncertainly to a black jutting rock. It moves with the moving sea. Aloha 'oe!

Abstract and realist, professional and amateur, are hung side by side.

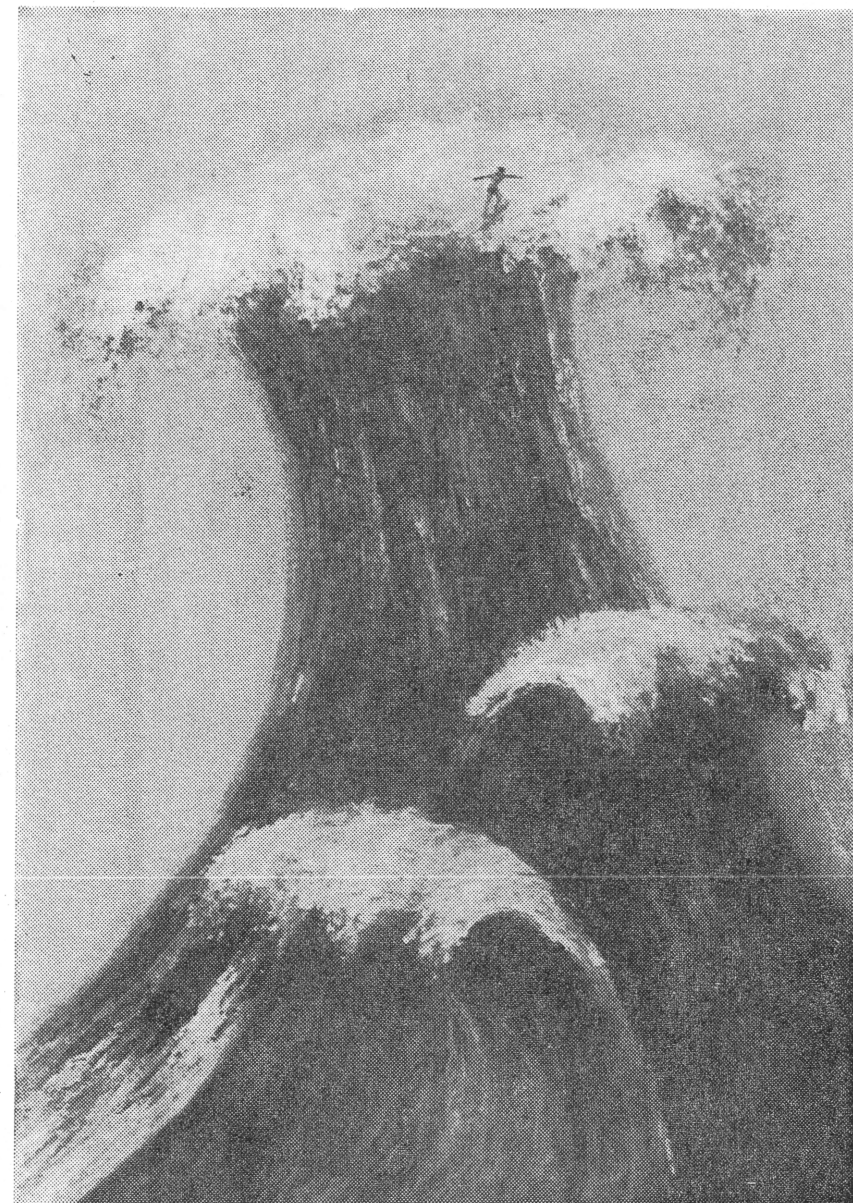
I illustrate two contrasting works, Rosalie Prussing's "The Big Splash" and Charles S. Marek's "Windward Breaker." One is all imagination. The other one is all technique.

Another museum without walls

Emerging from "Aquatic Hawaii," I felt wet and briny. While drying myself in the sunshine I surveyed another museum without walls. This one displays its wares across the street, outside the fairgrounds. It too was quite untainted by the museum-mausoleum concept.

Every weekend, artists hopefully hang their paintings along the zoo fence. They sit there throughout the day. They knit or chat, or look at their own exhibits.

Each artist awaits the connoisseur, born but not yet met, that will fall in love with his works when at long last they meet!



Rosalie Prussing's "The Big Splash"

Genius and madness: Are they related?

Jean Charlot welcomes questions from readers on all aspects of art. Write: Jean Charlot, Star-Bulletin, Box 3080, Honolulu 96802. Answers to selected questions will be published Wednesdays on the art page.

Q.—Is there any relation between artistic genius and mental instability?

A.—A tricky question. As do all artists, I believe in my genius. For me to deny too loudly any form of mental instability would be somewhat like whistling in the dark for reassurance.

I assume that I am not mad, but then so do all madmen. Some very great artists undoubtedly were mentally unstable.

Seized upon eagerly by novelists and script writers, Van Gogh comes first to mind. His tantrums proved manna for those unscrupulous alchemists. They transmuted his tears into gold.

Even the most square among squares relishes the story of how this artist cut off one of his ears, and offered it, neatly gift-wrapped, to a prostitute from Arles.

Less publicized is the similar case of Van der Goes, the fifteenth century Flemish painter. Already recognized in his day as a truly great master, he was the familiar of kings and emperors. In mid-career he chose to leave the world and retire to a monastery.

He became subject to fits of homicidal madness, and at least once attempted suicide. The prior who ruled the monastery knew his Bible. He remembered how King Saul had suffered from similar fits. No doctor knew how to cure the king's ailment.

The one successful remedy proved to be music, played on the harp by the young King David.

The prior in his turn arranged for music to be played so as to soothe the mentally distracted artist. Had he only attained sainthood, this 15th Century prior could well prove to be the ideal patron of present-day psychiatrists!

Thanks to music, Van der Goes improved, although understandable melancholy seized him when he looked at the many unfinished pictures he knew he would never have the time to finish!

Solely in terms of human drama, I must answer yes to your question. Some great artists have been un-

doubtedly mad.

There remains, however, to consider another piece of evidence, the very works painted by these so-called mad masters.

Art is a craft excessively demanding. In art-making, the co-ordination between brain and hand needs to be as delicately adjusted as are the cogs of a watch. In the case of the watch, a single grain of sand caught between its parts is enough to render it useless. In painting, the least wandering away from the initial impulse makes art impossible. So would the crassness of the craft, should hand and brain fail to co-ordinate.

Neither in the works of Van der Goes nor in those of Van Gogh are there to be found any such telltale weaknesses.

Thus the answer needs to be qualified. Contrary to popular belief, the so-called mad artists do not paint well because they are mad, but in spite of it. Their masterpieces are achieved in moments of lucidity between fits of madness.

Indeed, mental lucidity of an order only occasionally required of the non-artist remains an indispensable ingredient of art-making.