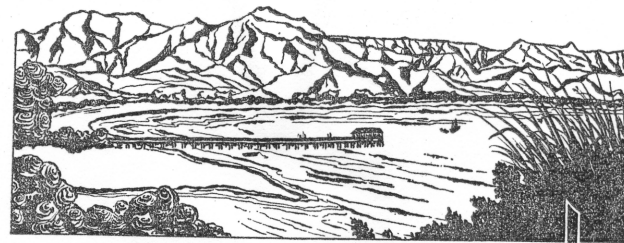


ART

By JEAN CHARLOT



hanalei art festival

The Hanalei Art Festival

I report from Hanalei, Kauai, where the Art Festival ended Sunday.

Bernice Midkiff, one of the most active organizers of this annual event, put at our disposition a cottage adjacent to St. William's Catholic Church.

This church, a tent-shaped building with tin roof and upheld by telephone poles, holds memories for me.

In 1959, while in New York, I painted its Way of the Cross on tiles. They were fired in the big city, and flown to Hanalei just in time for the official consecration of the building.

Hanalei is close to my heart. So are its magnificent palis and valleys; its ancient Hawaiian trails hugging the cliff walls perilously overhanging the sea; its small houses that blend with, rather than mar, the landscape; its taro patches and fish ponds.

Hanalei is the thriving reality of this old Hawaii that—or so Honolulu's bewail—is said to be gone forever.

The women worked hard

To manage an art festival is a complex affair. To do so away from the facilities of a great center is just short of heroic. The ladies in charge work hard and selflessly for the sake of culture.

The ladies' husbands are also busy. They practice arts of their own under open skies.

To raise sugar cane crops or augment the yield of pineapple fields; to supervise paniolos on the ranch and create feeds to improve the texture and taste of beef—these are some of the manly arts of Kauai.

Impressive, too, is the task of the men who, from the Kokee Tracking Station,



"Anatomy of a Sunflower" by Carol Ann LeGoullon

converse with astronauts in orbit.

This feat that they perform as a matter of course would have taxed the wild imaginings of even a Jules Verne.

They may appear old-fashioned

Compared with these arts, crafted into the open and spilling into outer space, such traditional arts as drawing and painting may seem at first a bit sedate, and Victorian in their flavor.

Hanalei's natural beauty is such that what beauty may be achieved with charcoal on paper or oil on canvas could appear superfluous and to some extent, expendable.

It is nothing of the kind. The urge to create illusions is one of man's deepest set of instincts. The more insistent nature's beauty, the more gnawing at our soul is the need for a creative ges-

ture, as if man's foolhardy double dare was an answer to nature's own dare.

Since prehistory, man's art has consistently been his subconscious reflex when faced with nature's brag.

The caveman's jungle held herds of towering mammoths. Bucking bison peopled his steppes. Yet he was not content until he had smeared on the walls of his cave magical illusions, ghost mammoths and ghost bison daubed on the stone with red ochre and charcoal.

They were food for the spirit

These images could neither be hunted nor eaten. They were food for the soul only.

Man has scarcely changed since these days.

While their husbands busy themselves with the realities of cane and pine and cattle, the Kauai ladies labor in more esoteric fields.

This year, as happened last year, I was sole juror for the visual arts. In this case, the juror does not double as an axman or any other kind of executioner. No painting or drawing, no print or mixed media, need be thrown into outer darkness. All entered items are exhibited.

My not unpleasant task was to award prizes. Thanks to the bountiful gesture of Don Towler, the prizes were merchandise to be picked at his art store in Lihue.

They came by barge and plane

The exhibition was housed in one of the classroom buildings. Pictures arrived by barge and by jet from the other Islands, but local work predominated.

The wealth of items entered and the limitations of wall space forced upon the organizers a style of hanging one could call old-fashioned, even though it was the proper way of doing not so long ago.

The pictures crowded as close together as children at the family table, and rose up, too, in vertical tiers. Today's up-to-date museum man may do it differently. He gives prime space to space itself and isolates each painting from its neighbors as if fearing contagion.

There were some advantages

Not surprisingly, the rustic way of hanging has advantages museum men and interior decorators would do well to ponder. It invites visual comparisons and certainly made the task of this lone juror easier.

Having distributed prizes and honorable mentions, I shall plead privileged communication between the juror and his thoughts as regards this subject. But a few remarks on new trends may interest the reader.

For a time, literary allusions were taboo in modern art. Typical of that attitude of yesterday is the title "Untitled." It plugged all possible leaks between the visual arts and the spoken word.

However, this self-imposed

Berlin wall or bamboo curtain is crumbling. In more than one case, the power of the word blends, and blends harmoniously, with the power of line and color.

Don Towler's "Store For Sale" shows a typical Kauai small store gone out of business. Hung between the padlocked door and the broken window panes, the artist reproduces a Coca Cola poster.

The false jollity of its meticulously rendered invitation, "Have a Coke," is used as an effective contrapunto to the visual desolation.

Words used meaningfully become a legitimate part of the picture, or even of the frame. In Clare Loring's "Of These I Sing," picture and frame are an unwrenchable unit.

The morose musician sings his dirge surrounded by a collage of newspaper clippings that summarize headlines of the day. Robbery . . . Vietnam . . . Black Ghetto . . . Battle . . . Birth Control . . . Mother-in-Law.

For Clare Loring, one of our leading abstractionists, this is a startling departure.

A pleasant discovery

Not surprisingly, I was acquainted with the work of most of the exhibitors. Among discoveries—pleasant discoveries—was a monochrome sketch by Virginia Beck, "Hawaiian Princess." It possesses intense dignity.

H. Tagami's "Of the Soil," pictures a gardener squatting low, busy weeding grass. Anti-decorative blacks and browns add to the solid earthiness of the subject.

It could have been painted in mid-nineteenth century by a realist, under the spell of Gustave Courbet.

David N. Noda painted a seascape just as a seascape should be. Its waves break into white foam over black rocks. But the cliché is so patiently and so sincerely

crafted as to acquire unexpected values.

An all-over darkness engulfs this outdoor scene, suggestive of another century. Perhaps, as happens with fashions, the new trend will prove to be a forgotten trend refurbished.

A memorial loan show of works by Isami Doi reminded us that this artist, one of Hawaii's greatest, can justly be claimed as Kauai's very own.

Our newly formed Foundation on Culture and the Arts could do worse than to learn from the grass roots example of Hanalei.

The Washington gentleman who came all the way

to Honolulu to explain the workings of the foundation at the Federal level disturbingly underlined what he considered the gigantic task of "selling" art to the masses.

The methods he favored reminded this ex-Frenchman of the force-feeding of geese to produce a delicious "pate de foie gras."

Hanalei tells a different story. Put man, any man, in contact with true art and it will be love at first sight. From then on, why not let nature take its course.



"Ling's Market" by Frank Train