

ART

By JEAN
CHARLOT



New works by Louis Pohl

Louis Pohl shows new paintings and prints at the Royal Hawaiian Art Gallery. One can follow, through his past work, an evolution that drew him towards the sea. The attraction eventually drew the painter literally into the sea.

I remember seeing a publicity shot of a painter painting under water. Dressed in a deep sea diver rubber suit he sat at his easel, palette in hand and dabbed paint—presumably water resistant—on his canvas. Plentiful bubbles escaped out of his helmet. Fishes surrounded him as connoisseurs.

This is not Pohl's method in obtaining his underwater pictures. Pohl is the opposite of a publicity seeker.

In face mask and snorkel he swims underwater unobserved, surveying the submarine habitat.

An angel has a parallel view

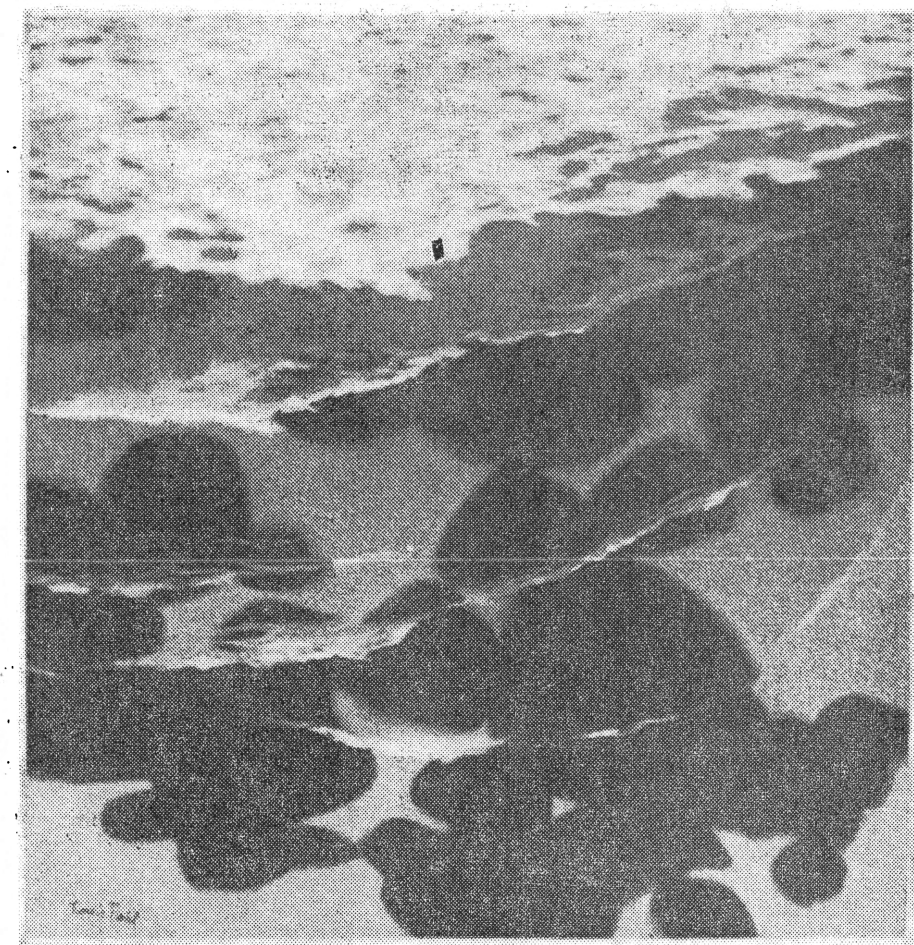
A parallel would be an angel's view of a landscape, as it dipped in leisurely horizontal flight over glens and vales.

One speaks of ceiling perspective where the mural is in an horizontal position over the spectator. In the case of Pohl, one could speak of a carpet perspective, the onlooker viewing the picture laid horizontally at his feet.

A visual puzzle is proposed when the paintings hang vertically on a wall, as all well-bred easel paintings should.

In an art world conditioned to abstract art, these submarine paintings come close to abstractions.

If Pohl was inclined, ever



Louis Pohl's "By the Sea"

so slightly, to attitudinize, he could with the greatest of ease erase the visual clues that help us bring back his subject matter from the borderline of the subjective to a part and parcel of the objective world.

One of Hawaii's best painters

Should he do so, perhaps then would the more exquisite among our art connoisseurs openly acknowledge a known fact: Pohl is one of the very best among our Island painters.

The artist, however, as he quotes from nature, insists on putting his quotes within quotes. He refuses to take credit for scenes he has surveyed.

If his inner self intrudes upon nature as he paints his seascapes, it is subconsciously.

Consciously, his aim is to point for the viewer the splendor of our shores and of our seas.

It is a coincidence that his pictures, imbued as they are with Island beauty, should be shown in this particular

gallery that nestles at the foot of our most famed tourist eyrie.

Tourist symbols of new freedom

Tourists indeed wander through the exhibit, daringly dressed or undressed in clothing chosen to signify their new-found freedom.

Did they only know it, here on the gallery walls is displayed a complete answer to their recurring query "Where do we go? What do we see?"

Not all would be equally at ease skimming the ocean in face mask and snorkel. But not all of Pohl's landscapes are submarine vistas. Some are scenes just above sea level, set at the edge of the sea.

Could not our visitors leave for a while the noisy safety of bustling Waikiki, and repair to some other beach where nature is more in evidence than man.

There, if for no better reason than there is nothing else to do, they could look at the very same Hawaii that Hawaiians knew long before

Captain Cook's arrival.

Pohl's work is a paean of praise for this Hawaiian Hawaii. In his pictures and in his prints, he never tires of relating the beauty to be found at the meeting point of earth and ocean.

The encroaching of scalloped foam over pink sand; black rocks shrouded in dark green limu, shining as they emerge at low tide; floating seaweeds that curve along the ever-changing curves of invisible currents.

Something dynamic, something cosmic, tinges Pohl's meditations at the edge of the sea.

But a natural shyness, perhaps no more than a Western disposition, restrains him before he takes the plunge into the depths of fashionable zen.

An antidote to the cosmic

His antidote to the cosmic is the comic. If a panoramic view of unrelieved shore and sea veers to the grandiose, a bit of human-made flotsam, as in "Lonely Boat," pares

Government patronage of the arts

Jean Charlot welcomes questions from readers on art and related topics. Write: Jean Charlot, Star-Bulletin, Box 3080, Honolulu 96802. Selected replies will appear on the Wednesday art page.

Q.—Has it ever been possible for a government to provide patronage for the arts without putting strings on art?

A.—The question is topical. Our Government is just now entering the field of art patronage with the recently founded National Foundation on the Arts.

To take a look at similar experiments in the past may help us make a guess at what the artist may expect in the near future.

Much of the art we now treasure would never have been created had it not been for government commissions.

By government we must not think in terms of the faceless automated Moloch that pretty much runs our lives today. In past centuries, art flourished best under governments that, by our standards, were small.

So small, in fact, that the ruler could establish a close relationship with the artist.

Italian art did not come into being in the Italy we know. The Italy of the Renaissance was a loose conglomeration of splinter countries, each an independent entity.

Monaco and the sovereign state of Vatican City give us an idea of the size and scope of the many Italies of the past.

An autonomous kingdom or dukedom was not much more than a city, walled to shelter its countryside dependents in case of siege or war.

All through the 14th and 15th centuries, Siena and Florence, towns situated 30 miles apart, waged hot wars alternating with uneasy truces.

Art related to war

Art was tied to war. Both governments celebrated their victories by commissioning from local artists bronzes and frescoes now justly acclaimed as masterpieces.

A citizen of the U.S.A., secure in the relative isolation and the mighty might of his immense country, can visualize such an obsolete political fabric as little more than a rustic setting for an operetta.

And yet some of the greatest art of the Western world came into being as a side product of this state of affairs.

Neither the state nor the arts are now as they were then.

Modern art may be complex in its mental processes. It is a simple affair as far as the mechanics of art making are concerned.

A garret, a canvas, oil paints, brushes, plus the artist and a dash of inspiration are its only needed ingredients.

The art patron may or may not appear at the tail end of the process.

In past centuries, before defined boundaries were staked between arts and crafts, it was otherwise.

It would have been unthinkable for the artist to attempt a work of art of some scope without a well defined commission.

Written contracts, penned in business-like fashion, preceded the making of the painting or of the sculpture.

A mere portrait, such as the Mona Lisa, could be commissioned by some rich merchant. For works of more substance, the patron was most often the ruler of the little country that was the artist's homeland.

While waiting for a state commission, the artist would rehearse, somewhat like a musician practicing finger exercises.

From Pisanello's studio hundreds of such drawing studies survive. They were literally his stock in trade.

He drew horses, women, devils, soldiers, designs for medals, even a lizard impaled on a stick as material for a future Saint George and the dragon.

He also drew dead men hanging from the gallows.

In those days, inspiration was not what we suppose it to be, a wild female who seizes the artist by the hair and drags him, willynilly, skywards.

Docilely, inspiration came as an adjunct to a business deal set on paper and sealed.

Government commissions were for monumental works, frescoes or statues to be erected in public places.

Indeed, the power of a government is specifically needed to force upon the reluctant janitors of this world monumental works of art and the mess attendant upon their making.

As governments slackened in their art interest, monumental commissions became a thing of the past.

It is at that time that the image of the artist starving and struggling alone in his garret was born.

In our country, in the days of the great depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt restored governmental art commissions. Much bourgeois laughter greeted the news. Boondoggling became synonymous with state money misspent.

It was a good investment

Thirty years later, with delayed insight, one realizes that helping the ill-nourished artists proved, money-wise, a splendid investment.

Pictures acquired literally in exchange for a crust of bread were signed by men like Ben Shahn, Stuart Davis, Jackson Pollock and Archibald Gorky.

Their present monetary value more than equals what money was spent on the whole project.

Certainly, even though government-sponsored, the works of these artists were far from faltering in creativity.

We are at the dawn of another experiment of government-sponsored art. The newly founded foundation intends to bring its bounties to the farthest corners of our country, including our farflung Hawaiian Islands.

The paternalistic approach that worked so well in Roosevelt's times is no longer possible.

A preparatory survey now in course is patterned after the methods used by General Motors to probe a potential market for a new car. Art data will be fed to computers. It is too soon to even guess at the results.

I wish I felt as optimistic as the gentleman who supervises the project from Washington. Yet his optimism is cautiously worded.

He believes that, once the preliminary survey is over, for the American artist "hope will not be unreasonable."

it down to human scale.

Pohl's prints are beautifully conceived and executed. The specially textured paper, the six or seven separate color printings needed to achieve a harmony so subtle that it could be called

a near-monochrome, transport the onlooker into sheer visual magic.

Nevertheless, Pohl prefers to think of himself as a craftsman rather than as a magician. As is the case with his oils, he willfully breaks the spell.

A small black crab scurrying busily through an exquisite semi-abstract orchestration of blues does the trick. Or else a red starfish.

There is in Pohl a mild strain of Disneyland. It comes to the rescue of Pohl

the artist when he wax lyrical or grandiose.

Partaking of the best these two Pohls—no pun intended—the resulting pictures and prints may satisfy equally the sophisticated lover and the nature lover.