

# ART

By JEAN CHARLOT



Jean Charlot welcomes questions on art and related subjects. Write to him at the Star-Bulletin, Box 3080, Honolulu, Hawaii 96802. Selected replies will appear in his column.

## Art for the growing family

Q.—In raising a family and hoping they will absorb some appreciation of art—on a limited budget—what are the merits of buying fine reproductions of masterpieces, versus buying local originals by lesser artists, that is, compared to the artists who did the masterpieces?

A.—Already in one of my previous answers to a question I mentioned my forceful opposition to what the printing trade calls "fine reproductions."

They have their place in art books, within covers. To frame and hang them as if they were originals is a game of pretence.

In our present world, riddled with advertising, where image is more important than substance, I cannot advise you to implant such mannerisms inside your home.

Image en lieu of substance has become the rule in business, where packaging is more essential than content.

"Image" is worked hard at in international politics. "Image" hopefully replaces substance in war and in peace.

## Originals have spiritual power

True art is an ethical affair. An original work of art is the very matter manipulated by the artist in the fever of creation. It is packed with spiritual power.

To commune with this unique object is an experience that no reproduction can help us to even approximate.

Your question refers specifically to art hung in the home and for the family. Could you acquire an original Van Gogh on the limited budget you mention, the



Honore Daumier's "A Politician"

masterpiece may not prove after all to be a proper item for the decoration of your drawing room.

I was acquainted with a lady of wealth who owned a major Van Gogh and displayed it in her town house.

The exquisitely carved French rococo frame was nearly as expensive as the expensive canvas. In the drawing room where it hung, tea was served, and what amenities go with tea-pouring flourished. "Cream or lemon? Lemon or cream?"

## Van Gogh got some attention

I sat sipping my tea, transfixed by the sight of the Van Gogh. It reminded me of an even more unusual object that another friend of mine, somewhat of an original, dearly treasured.

In a small box, comfortably lying on a bed of cotton, he owned a severed human ear.

Its complexion was astonishingly rosy, its tuft of hair shone a golden red, just the color of Van Gogh's hair.

"Cream or lemon? Lemon or cream?" faded into oblivion. The beauty of the Van

Gogh painting remained inseparably linked for me to his tortured life, to his cutting off, in a fit of madness, his own ear.

## You just don't do such things

I could not but feel that using a Van Gogh to further a scheme of interior decoration was slightly obscene.

In its genteel way, it was a faux pas similar to the delight that my unusual friend took in handling the pitiful content of his little box.

What to do with an original Van Gogh may never be a problem for you. But if you really wish to own the works of great masters, even a limited budget cannot stop you.

In their own lifetime, more than one artist, catering to rich patrons, felt that his work should in some way reach also the poor and the near poor.

Prints were the answer.

## Prints are really originals

Original prints are not reproductions. They are as

original as are original paintings. They are not unique as is a painting, and thus cannot bring out in their owner the pride of possessing something no one else possesses.

For your purpose however, and for your budget, prints are the correct answer.

At times, they may come to you by accident. Ca. 1930, on my first stay in New York, I found myself a spectator at an auction held on University Place.

Mostly furniture, framed family photographs, and a single print, an etching.

The auctioneer knew his furniture but he knew less about art. "Monsieur Delacroix, a Frenchman" had signed the etching.

It was adjudged to me for fifteen dollars. Thus did I acquire an original work by the Romantic master.

## He was a hungry artist

It is a youthful production, dating from his Gothic period, when the hungry artist thrived on a diet of gargoyles, armor and moonlight.

A caparisoned steed nervously paws the ground, reined in by a figure dressed between troubadour and knight, plumes overflowing its velvet cap. It cost me no more than a fine reproduction.

An English master of the eighteenth century, William Hogarth, engraved his paintings for the specific purpose of reaching the lowbrows.

Even today these engravings can be had for modest sums, if one is not too choosy concerning the fine points of collecting, such as the size and cleanliness of the margins.

Hogarth liked to moralize and some of his engravings are the despair of dealers, ill-fitted as they are for decorative purposes.

## A wake in a London slum

The print I own, (and re-

produced on this page), is such a one. It represents a wake in a London slum.

The corpse lies in its poor man's coffin surrounded by relatives, some mourning, some scheming.

One forages through drawers for hidden money. Another guzzles the dead man's gin to drown her sorrow.

The widow already flirts with a potential new husband. A child unconcernedly plays with a top.

I do not recommend this one print for family consumption, but then nicer ones may bring higher prices.

One of the great masters of the nineteenth century, Honore Daumier, drew cartoons for weekly magazines throughout his lifetime.

Photographic processes had yet to be invented. Daumier drew his cartoons on lithographic stones. These prints are original lithographs.

## His lithographs are inexpensive

Oil paintings by Daumier are beyond the means of all but millionaires. Lithographs by Daumier may be had for five dollars or less.

Why not let rich collectors outbid each other for the scarce paintings, and acquire instead Daumier prints?

Why are they so cheap? Dealers can hardly hide from their customers the fact that Daumier drew over 4,000 different lithographs. Each was printed at an average of 5,000 copies, the circulation figure for the magazine Illustrated.

This enormous number of proofs has not yet been absorbed by collectors, and in fact may never be.

To embellish your home with such masterpieces would be no drain on the family budget.

So much as regards the works of old masters. Do not—I repeat do not—hang reproductions on your walls when you can hang originals by the same masters.

## Local, yes; but lesser? Perhaps not

The second part of your question puzzles me. Local artists need not be lesser artists. Of course time will wear away the chaff.

But there should be no prejudice towards what it is we have at hand, or what is just around the corner.

Artists can give you and



William Hogarth's "A London Wake"

yours a more vivid concept of what art is about than even the contemplation of works of art.

The artist is the goose that lays the eggs, some of them pure gold.

To have artists in your home is a surer way to awake in your children an interest in art than choking your wall space with art items.

## Some rules for entertaining artists

Artists are not always the easiest of guests. Do not invite too many of them at one time. Discussions about fine esthetic points may prove confusing to the uninitiated, even boring.

Etiquette requires that you sit your guest artist cozily, facing one of his own works. Thus will he prove a satisfied guest, and a well-behaved one.

Treasure local art and artists. The School of New York has given us masters. The French Riviera has inspired painters. Paris, of course, has nurtured artists.

Perhaps to better appreciate their works one should live in New York, or in Paris, or on the Riviera.

Local artists have an advantage over those. They share with us the same soil.

Like it or not, the Hawaiian stone age flourished less than two centuries ago. Asia is our close neighbor. Overpowering natural beauty has yet to lose its fight against cement.

Hawaii has a very special flavor. Like a fish in water, we are so immersed as not to be conscious of it. Both layman and artist bathe in it.

Regardless of the possibility of acquiring old masters, for you and yours local art may prove the best of introductions to great art.



"Search," an etching by Island artist Edward Sta- sack.