

ART

by Jean Charlot

A grand gathering

For an artist, the events of last week approximated the millenium. From New York and Washington, from Los Angeles, Hawaii, Kauai and Maui, men and women of good will zeroed in on our city.

Their reason for so doing: The Governor's Conference on Culture and the Arts.

Graciously, Governor and Mrs. John A. Burns invited the participants to the State mansion. There our hosts broke bread with the artists. Art was toasted in champagne!

The purpose of the meetings was twofold. Art was to be made available to the people at large. Artists were to receive help. Official organizations formed at Federal and State level stood ready to implement this cultural revolution with grants.

Given the novelty of the venture, speakers chose to focus their sights on a better world envisioned as "just around the corner," rather than dwell on the defective present.

Sport and art in the newspaper

The executive director of the Arts Council of America, Ralph Burgard, pinpointed the difference. In the newspapers of the future, said he, art news would receive equal coverage with sport news. Implicitly this meant that, in this better world, art fans would be as numerous as baseball fans are today.

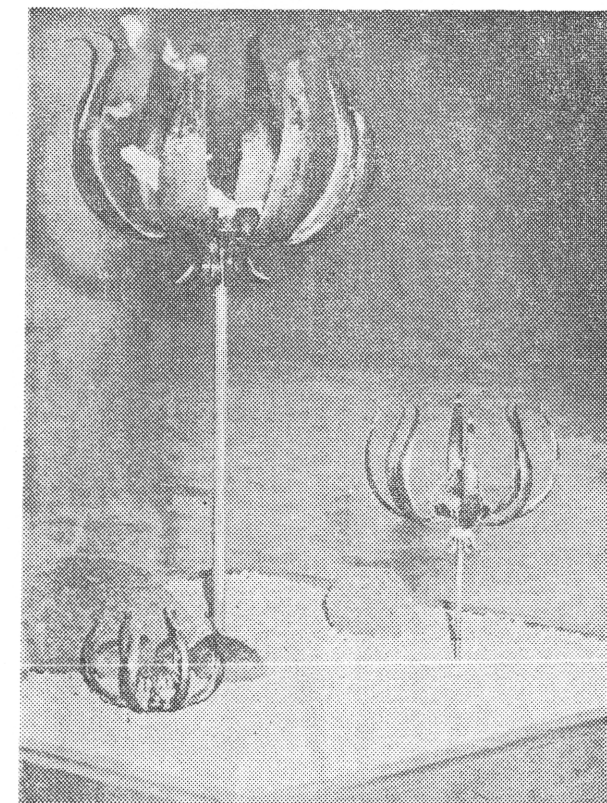
So much for bringing art to the masses. On the subject of help to the artist, plans—as far as the visual arts are concerned—are not yet at an advanced stage.

The trickling of the gold stashed up in Washington down the empty pocket of painter and sculptor will have to wait a mite.

No matter. The artist is accustomed to waiting.

Over 2,000 years ago, Plato banned the artist from his utopian republic. More enlightened, our own Republic has learned to live with the artist.

Even so, the non-artist watches him warily. At this stage, a pat on the back by a



Tom Hirai's wrought-copper torch

successful politician is, for the bemused artist, a consoling experience.

Besides events relating to the performing arts, two important art shows opened during the Conference: the 17th Annual Artists of Hawaii Exhibition at the Academy of Arts and, at the Honolulu International Center, the First Annual Display of Hawaii Crafts and Design.

The Academy show is scheduled to last a few weeks. The crafts show lasted only two days, just long enough so that it could be viewed by our out-of-State V.I.P.'s.

The exhibitors would have liked to keep the display open a while longer but could ill afford to do so. Even as a group, they could not see their way to raise the rental fee asked for by the City!

That such a beautiful and significant show happens in our far-from-perfect world is reassuring. Even when an orator orates on art, the artist is at best a casual listener. Brain work and words are not his true medium.

Much of his thinking is done

with heart and hand. The artist is a manual worker.

To carve wood or cast bronzes, to paint in enamels, to weave, to wax batiks, presupposes able fingers and the exacting patience of a craftsman.

Add vision, evidenced in all the items displayed, and the tenuous borderline between fine arts and crafts vanishes.

Some speakers emphasized the fact that the artist is not exactly a social being. This show portrays him as desirous to serve society, even if society hardly reciprocates.

The craftsman makes jewels for the proud and cups for the thirsty. His pots may hold flowers, his dishes food. His tapestries and weavings are made to brighten your walls.

Our State is rich in ancient traditions. The exhibit from Ulu Mau Village constitutes a kind of touchstone, being undiluted Hawaii.

It illustrates a typical awareness of the beauty of natural materials, wood, fiber, shells and seeds.

One of our imported

speakers drew a distinction between the popular artist, shackled by ethnical bonds, and the fine-arts artist who is free to borrow from this or that tradition, as need or fancy dictates.

This butterfly image is insidious. And yet the weaves and tapa, the shell and seed leis of the Ulu Mau display refute the contention. Here creativeness freely accepts the bonds of tradition. To take root, one must learn to stay put.

Charles Chow's wood carvings tell a slightly different story. In his sculptures, beauty emerges from the

artist's respect for his material. He works, not to destroy the grain and texture of the

The hungry artist

Jean Charlot welcomes questions on art. Write to him in care of the Star-Bulletin, Box 3080, Honolulu 96802. Selected questions will be answered on this page.

Q. What happened to the struggling, unrecognized artist we once used to read about? Is he still struggling? Or has our affluent and art conscious Great Society solved his problems?

A. I detect a note of cynicism in the wording of the question. To be true to tradition your struggling artist should live in a garret, a room bare of furniture, with a cupboard bare of bones and, in winter, no heating.

If he does not, you shall be disappointed. So will those nice people eager to help if they hope to recognize the unrecognized artist by such stark surroundings.

Starvation and pneumonia may have taken their toll. More probably, art dealers are responsible for the disappearance of the breed. There is a mushrooming multitude of art dealers. Each boasts of owning a substantial stable of artists. To hunt and bag unrecognized artists is a sportive must for the dealer.

To be taken in tow by a merchant does not make an artist happier.

In New York I was a friend of Louis Eilshemius,

the unwilling subject of the best-selling tear-jerker, "Sitting on the Ashes."

Descendant of Dutch settlers, he lived in bachelor squalor in the totally mortgaged ancestral home on East 57th Street. His beard and hair were unkempt, his baggy pants those of a Bowery bum, his coat torn to shreds. In art, he was a true master and knew it.

As he was close to dying, one of the best dealers in town bought his paintings wholesale, for a small sum, and cleaned and framed them for retail.

The show was a success, drawing crowds and rave reviews.

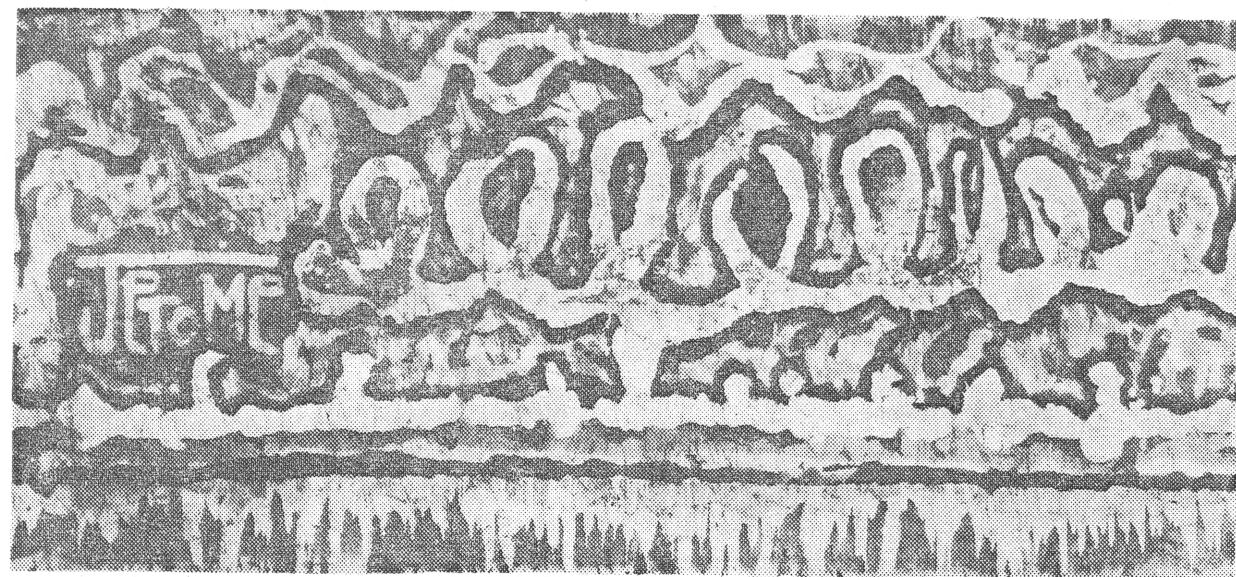
I asked Eilshemius to come with me and see his own show. He piteously answered, "They won't let me in."

Failure needs no garret to be failure. A painter who is forced to give time and thought to something else than painting is, in a way, a failure.

Looking backwards, I see that for 30 years I gave three fourths of my working time to teaching and to matters related to teaching.

The failure of course is not ours, but that of a society insisting that the artist prove himself in terms that a non-artist can understand.

If allowed one wish, what more could the artist ask than to be allowed to stay rent-free in his garret and paint?



Jerome Wallace's batik on silk

wood, but to make it emerge with utmost clarity.

Even though metal tools are used, one feels the logic of the stone adze, especially in a canoe shaped tray. Chow lets the chunk of wood dictate the shape, rather than impose upon it a symmetrical symmetry.

Weavings and tapestries follow the same pattern, incorporating to the man-made material twigs, bamboo, dried leaf stems.

Torches, a typical Island product, are renovated in the work of Tom Hirai. His long-stemmed metal flowers are delicate blooms of hard copper with, at their center a dynamic pistil of flame caged between the curves of petals and sepals.

Edward Brownlee exhibits delicate silver jewelry that comes as a surprise for

those who know only his monumental sculptures.

Petroglyphs have instructed him as to the vanity of anatomy and proportion once the human form is upgraded to the plane of art.

Evelyn Beveridge presents bronzes, the most impressive one being a processional cross decorated with cloisonne enamel.

Most emotional exhibit was the group of pottery pieces on loan from the family of Sugen Inouye. Displayed with utmost simplicity, they bespeak the loss that Island art suffered when this master potter died in his twenties.

To recapitulate the events of the week, the artists of Hawaii have been deeply touched by the attention displayed by officialdom, the desire to help and to facili-

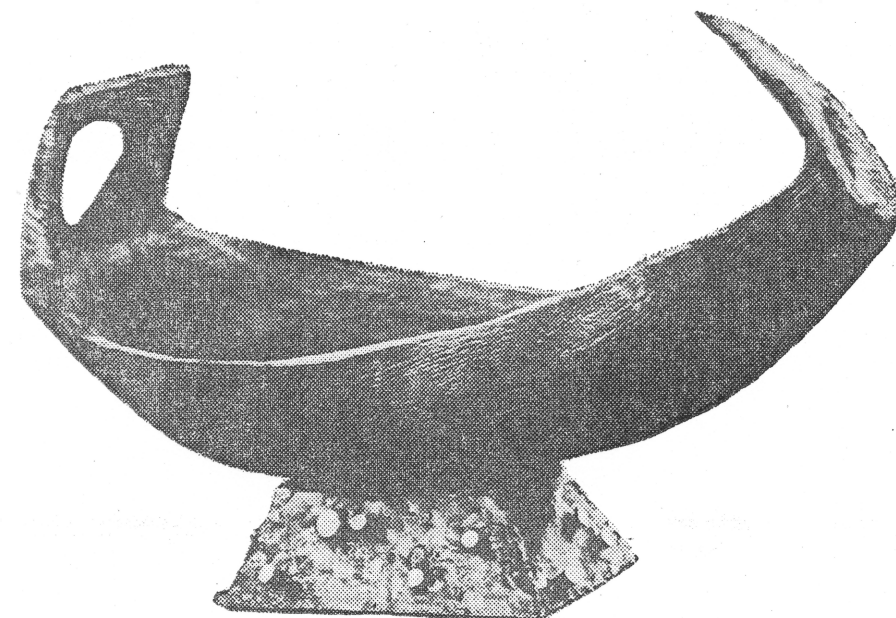
tate their work.

They also are grateful to our Governor for lending his name, his home and his time, to signalize the importance of the Conference on Culture and the Arts.

Now that our main speakers have flown back to the Mainland, we who live here hope that this was not just another event, of which the best that can be said in retrospect is that a good time was had by all. We eagerly await the logical followup.

A consciousness of the importance of art is not deeply embedded—as yet—in American society. Other interests vie for instant attention.

By an uneasy coincidence, this same week that glorified the arts in Hawaii was observed as National Dog Week in the rest of our United States.



Charles Chow's canoe-shaped tray, a wood-carving