

# ART

by Jean Charlot



## A chapel mighty like a rose

Today is the day of the consecration, on the St. Louis-Chaminade campus, of the Chapel of Our Lady, Mystical Rose.

Planned for the Marianist community, it will be one of the first religious buildings supple enough in its plan and accessories to embody from the start the requirements of the post-Vatican Council liturgy.

Brother James Roberts supervised the over-all concept. Guy Rothwell is the architect.

Of all the arts, architecture is the one that affects most obviously and permanently the esthetic standards of a community.

Other displays, including those of the performing arts, come and go within a short span of time.

A building, for better or for worse, remains publicly on show, from its noisy beginnings when piles are driven into the ground to its equally noisy end, tolled that it is by the iron ball of the wrecker.

In our Hawaii, buildings mushroom up and up, their ranks as serried as puffballs on a lawn after a heavy rain. Buildings are not, alas, edible or short lived.

Too often, the dominant esthetic they disclose is no more than that of the "quick buck."

## Most buildings are mediocre

No wonder we prefer a vista of sea and mountains to these mediocre sights.

Yet good architecture can at times match with its man-made beauty the beauty of nature.

Our Lady, Mystical Rose, is not a large building. It occupies a circular area roughly 80 feet in diameter. It will sit at most 260 people and its height is as modest as are its other dimensions.

Religious architecture has known drastic changes in our time.

Centuries ago, Gothic cathedrals were structures as



The Chapel of Our Lady, Mystical Rose, at Chaminade College. Guy Rothwell is the architect.—Photos by Albert Yamauchi.

boldly conceived as they were beautiful.

Neo-Gothic, inherited from the 19th century, was but its sad and malformed descendant.

Church interiors were dark and dank, their windows obscured by stained glass that the Chartres glass workers would have disavowed in despair.

In this dim interior, potted vigil lights emphasized the blatant polychromy of hordes of plaster statues.

Saints held palms and attitudinized, with a smile on their rouged lips and with a soupçon of make-up on their rosy cheeks.

Altars were solidly anchored to the wall. Imposing steps removed them far above the layman as if to avoid contamination.

Altar tops were clustered high with candlesticks, flower vases and many gingerbread ornaments.

In the thirties, a revulsion, or rather a revolution, was in the air.

Pioneers, enthusiastic as befits pioneers, decreed that all neo-Gothic was an abomination. A few bold clerics agreed.

The malcontents set themselves the task of building modern churches. If the church was already there,

progressive artists were commissioned to purify its antiquated interior.

Stained glass was replaced by clear glass. Light and air were let in. Brown woodwork was whitewashed. High candlesticks were replaced by stubby candlesticks.

The many plastercast saints were gleefully ejected from the temple and cast into outer darkness.

Far-off missions in Asia or Africa found themselves suddenly blessed with an influx of bad art.

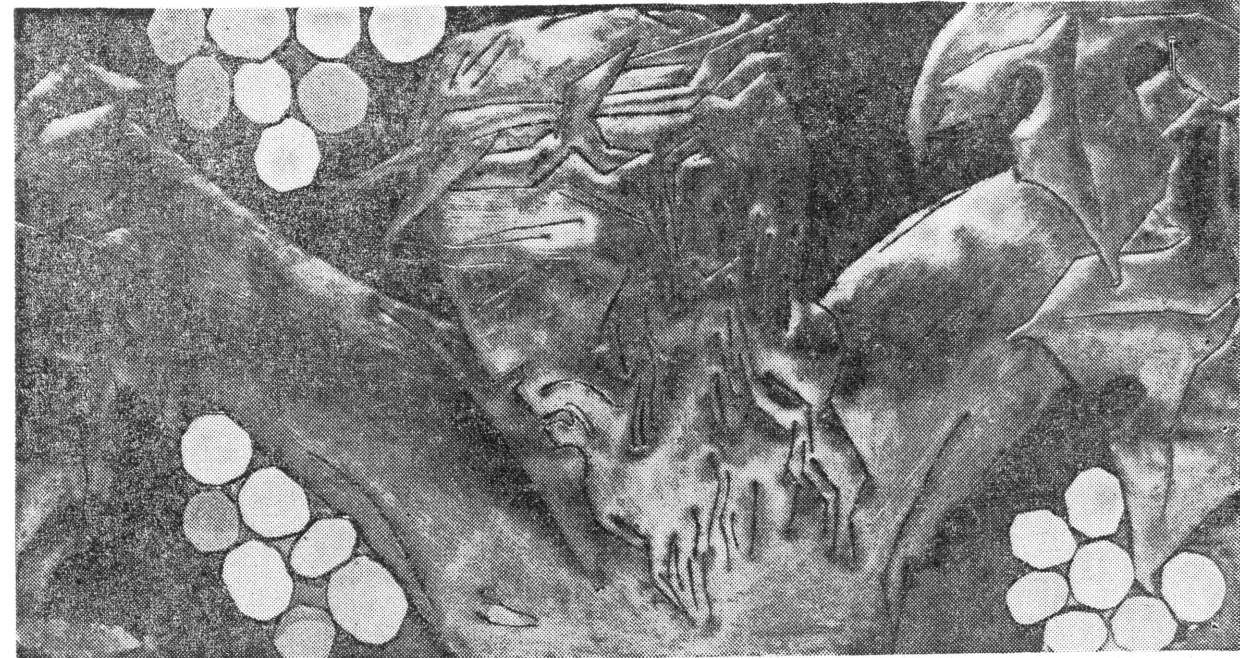
The reformers, having labored in God's vineyard through the heat of the day, took a day off, long enough to find their work good.

Though I was active in this liturgical movement, I held reservations as to the drastic results. Modern chapels were now so purified and so cleansed as to resemble hospital corridors.

True, in the olden days, the altar had been piled up with unseemly junk as a discarded table in the family attic. Now it was a bare slab fit for a morgue.

The new churches mostly illustrated the horror felt by men of good taste towards the bad taste of their forefathers.

The positive approach was weaker. What to put in the



Portion of the copper-and-enamel tabernacle exterior, a Charlot design executed by Evelyn Beveridge.

place of plaster saints and Little Infants of Prague was a question that remained mostly unanswered.

The present chapel, embodying as it does the directions of the Vatican Council, illustrates a third phase in the story of 20th century religious art.

The new devotional approach minimizes the awesomeness of the Dweller in the House of God. It emphasizes instead His hospitality.

Gone are the steps of an altar set far away and high above the congregation. Gone, thanks to the circular plan, are the hierarchical strata of benches. In this chapel, even the proudest Pharisee would not know how to lord it over his neighbor.

Even the humblest Publican, choosing the last bench of all, would find himself no more than 35 feet away from the central altar.

Already when seen at a distance, Our Lady, Mystical Rose, is reminiscent of a rose.

Thirteen delicate flare-ups in the circular roof suggest petals and sepals.

## Crescents of stained glass

Inside, tucked under each petal is a crescent of stained glass. This stained glass is not of the kind that keeps out the world or the sunshine.

Each pastel color sheet is set between two sheets of clear glass. And untinted glass interplays with the colored glass in fluid abstract rhythms that Brother Roberts designed.

Only yesterday the priest said Mass face to the wall, as if to warn the congregation against eavesdropping on his dialogue with God.

Today the priest faces the

people. The taboo is lifted. All take part in the dialogue.

New accessories are needed to fit in with the new way. Once a towering affair, the tabernacle that stands between priest and congregation now must be low and unobtrusive. This one is only seven inches high.

Made of copper repoussé, it situates figures of the Old and the New Testaments in a bower of grape vine.

At a distance its main visual effect will be that of the bunches of grapes set in high relief, enameled in lime yellow, blue gray and chartreuse. Evelyn Beveridge did the work, based on our design.

We also modeled and cast the processional crucifix, made of bronze and enamel. Carried before the celebrant as he goes to the altar, it is to be planted as a pennant that faces the priest during the services.

## A monumental sculpture

Another local artist, Isami Enemoto, designed, modeled and fired the monumental sculpture that is seen against the apsidal wall. It represents Our Lady upholding the monogram of Christ.

Ripples in circular motion at her head, block-like watery swells at her feet, approach abstraction. Delicate polychromies feature burnt

orange, beige and blue gray. Tan is the flesh, a welcome change from the piggy-pink complexion that plaster saints sported.

The dark brown of the naked clay is everywhere featured.

Enemoto modestly disclaims that he is a sculptor and prefers to label himself as a carpenter working with clay.

Brother Ronald Dempsey cut vestments of antique shape out of Thai silks. Woven in Paris, the golden cope reminds one of Hawaiian feather cloaks.

On a tour of the Mainland and of Europe, Brother Roberts brought back other cult objects.

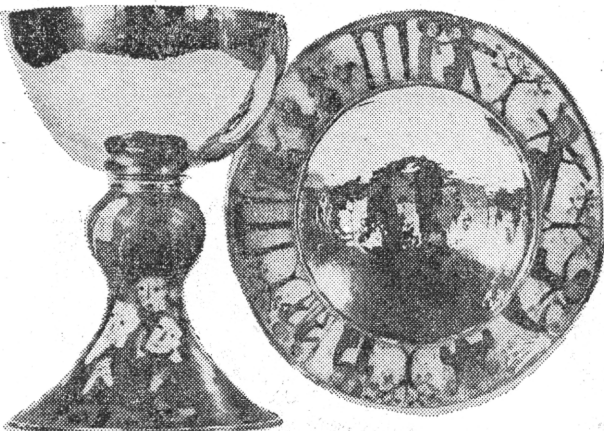
When feasible, he visited the artists themselves, which accounts for the choice results.

## Lovely building at low cost

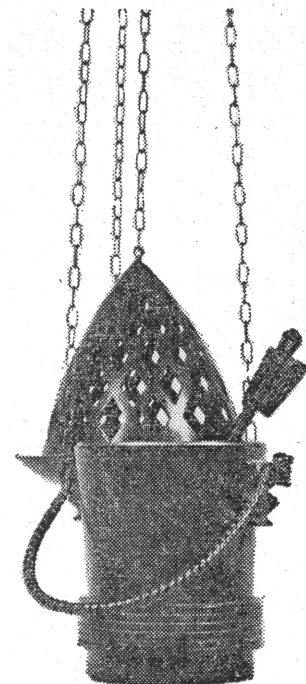
The Chapel of Our Lady, Mystical Rose, is, architecturally, a lovely addition to Honolulu's mixed bag of buildings.

For practical minds, one should add that the total cost, including architecture and accessories, does not exceed \$150,000.

This low budget represents infinite patience and planning, and selfless dedication on the part of many a man of good taste and good will.



Chalice and paten, made by an artist in West Germany.



Bronze censer by Lambert Ruci.