

## ART

by Jean Charlot



## A preview

Tonight is the preview opening of the 19th annual exhibition of the Painters and Sculptors League at the Contemporary Arts Center.

John Hultberg, artist-in-residence at the Honolulu Academy of Arts juried the show jointly with his wife, Lynn Drexler, also a practicing artist. Twenty-one items in all—roughly one third of the paintings and sculptures submitted—were accepted.

Quality is high. The range of styles is narrow. Overwhelmingly, the majority of the works exhibited are painted in the current idiom loosely labeled as abstract expressionism.

Not being on the "in" of this affair, I do not know if, among the rejects, there were items of quality that could have helped give a more rounded presentation of our local brand of art-making.

## They are missed

I miss the works of excellent artists, old-fashioned enough in their outlook to praise in line and color the beautiful sights of our Islands.

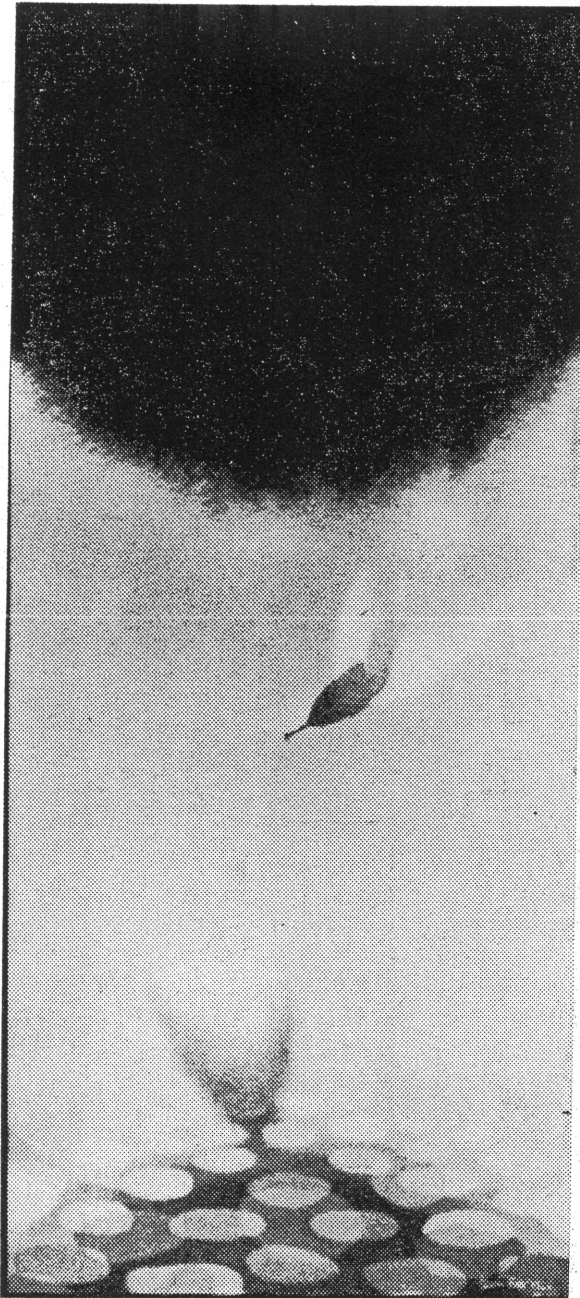
At the opposite end of the scale of styles, I also miss the doings of young progressives who react, at times noisily, against their elders' sophistication.

Local equivalents of sculptured hamburgers and hand-painted tomato cans are by now very much a part of our artistic milieu.

To appreciate this show in an unbiased manner, one should first enter into a sort of mental decompression chamber, there to forget the outer world and everyday sights.

Most straightforward objective statement in the show is Ilma Anderson's "Rift". An African panoramic landscape that superposes horizontal layers of grass, trees, cliffs and distant mountains, it dwarfs man even though man is nowhere to be seen.

Louis Pohl's "Morning



Tadashi Sato's "Falling Leaf"

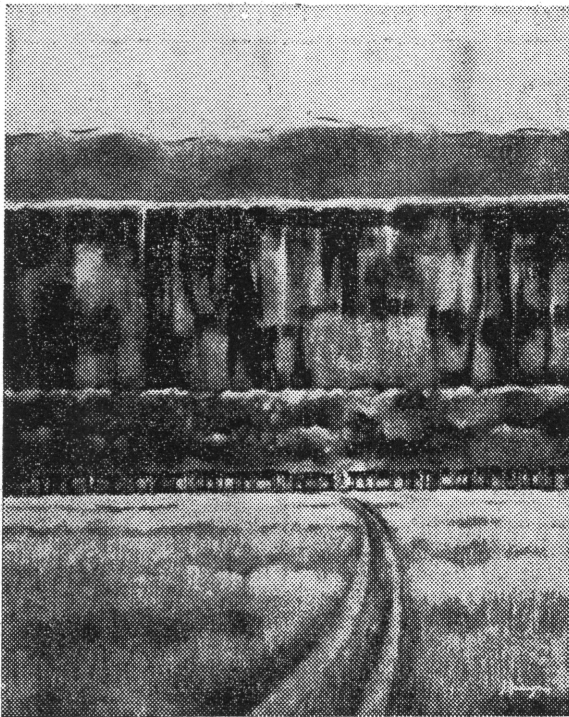
Light," one of his delicate shoreline scapes, shows that nature at times imitates art, in this case abstract art!

## Sato's work

Astonishingly, Tadashi Sato, famed abstractionist, should be ranged here with

those who bring to the somewhat rarefied climate of the show a touch, a pinch as it were, of unadulterated nature.

His "Falling Leaf" is undoubtedly a leaf, leaf-shaped, slightly frayed at the edge, and delicately veined. It flutters downwards against the gray green void of a classical Sato



Ilma Anderson's "Rift"

vertical abstraction, suggestive of a rain cloud at the top and of a pebbly pool at bottom.

The jurors had a keen eye for quality. The level of accomplishment remains high. It would be presumptuous to grade, as would a schoolmaster, the orthodox type of abstract paintings that constitute the bulk of the show.

Much search and research undoubtedly preceded the architectural—nearly mural—compactness that characterizes John Kjargaard's "Yellow Garden."

Ben Norris' "Red Blue No. 7" is impressively planned and its pigment expressively manipulated. Even its faint whiff of the pedagogical pleases the retired professor that I am!

## Total void

James Rosen's "Manoa" stands starkly alone, being an expanse of what, to my eye, appears as a field of unrelieved black.

It is so drastically simple that it cannot fail to raise complex queries as to how it came to be.

We know Rosen as a delicate draftsman. As a painter, his early Hawaiian landscapes showed cliff forms dimly perceived in the gathering dusk. In "Manoa", total darkness engulfs all with absolute finality.

What does it mean? Has

the painter reached on the visual plane a summit similar to that of which the Spanish mystics spoke of as the dark night of the soul?

Where can one go from here? For a mind geared in good faith to "Manoa", even a single variation of value or of color would seem an anti-climax!

## European visit

On my return from Europe friends asked me if I had learned much on the way. Indeed yes. Jet travel through many countries, and walking through many museums strengthened my belief that art is not entirely an exportable commodity.

In the Louvre, in the Prado, in Munich or in London, the Raphaels, Michelangelos, Titians, are beautiful to see. Yet there is a hothouse artificiality in their being there at all, rather than in Italy.

In past centuries, kings and emperors coveted these masterpieces in a play of wealth and power identical to that of American billionaires today.

The pride of the Louvre, Mona Lisa's smile, is there because King Francis of France half coaxed and half kidnapped the aging Leonardo to his castle of Amboise, just in time for the master to die there. His works became royal spoils.

## Bonnard's work

In Paris, at the Musee de l'Orangerie, I saw a retrospective of Bonnard's life work.

When young, he loved to depict the streets of Paris, not tourist fare but unassuming perspectives, slate roofs, tiled chimneys, walls uncertainly whitewashed. Windows enlivened by a play of shutters half closed or half open, lace curtains perceived in the gloom of sparsely lit interiors.

Going back to my lodgings on the left bank it was an illumination in depth to walk through streets where pavement, walls, roofs and windows, all were shaped and colored a la Bonnard!

Contrary to popular belief,

## James Rosen's "Manoa"

Masters never were propped on a high pedestal as a stylite saint on top a column. Instead, they remain sensitively keyed to their surroundings. So much so that it can be said that the folk art of their countrymen already contained the seed of their genius.

## In Spain

Goya passed his youth "slumming" among his own people, translating into tapestry cartoons their lowbrow costumes and customs. To this day, Spanish folk festivals are called "Goyescas."

In Munich, the State Museum displays peasant art. Crude underglass daubs that kindled folk devotions, naive ex-votos modeled in wax—limbs and livers, spleens and wombs—that once hung in thanksgiving before the miraculous image.

Thoroughly Germanic in form and color, these humble works are the humus

that nourished the art of great masters—Lochner, Grunewald, Aitdorfer—whose works are fought for by museums the world over.

With these thoughts in mind, returning to Hawaii was a revelation.

## Unique

This corner of the world is unique in the wealth of its folkways and its art ways. The ceramic of Japan, the calligraphy of China, the many Pacific Island cultures, belong here.

And so do in their way the abstractions of the School of New York and the pop happenings from Los Angeles!

Such rich cross-currents already shape the work of our contemporaries, even those who insist that art needs neither roots nor locale.

If precedents hold true, they also hold a promise for the future, bound as they are to enrich the works of Old Masters as yet unborn.