

ART

by Jean Charlot



Good shows

There is such a cluster of good shows at the Honolulu Academy of Arts that it is difficult to choose among them.

The craft display, by prominent local artists, is truly high in quality. It will help destroy the Berlin wall that academic minds raised between the Fine Arts and the applied arts.

All healthy cultural periods have ignored the distinction. In the past, this made possible monumental masterpieces crafted out of a variety of materials. They range from the medieval cathedrals of France to the rococo palaces of Bavaria.

Our local craftsmen are fully able to realize a similar enterprise. Judging from the present show, the result would be both Hawaiian and contemporary in flavor. Is there a patron with enough vision and money to make the potential masterpiece come true?

Another Academy event is a major addition to its permanent collection. Entitled "Accords," and painted in 1922, this large work by Amedee Ozenfant is a gift

from John Gregg Allerton. The artist considered it, without undue pride and in the sense used by guild artisans of it, a masterpiece.

Purism movement

Though short lived, Purism, the movement that Ozenfant fathered, holds a secure place in the history of art.

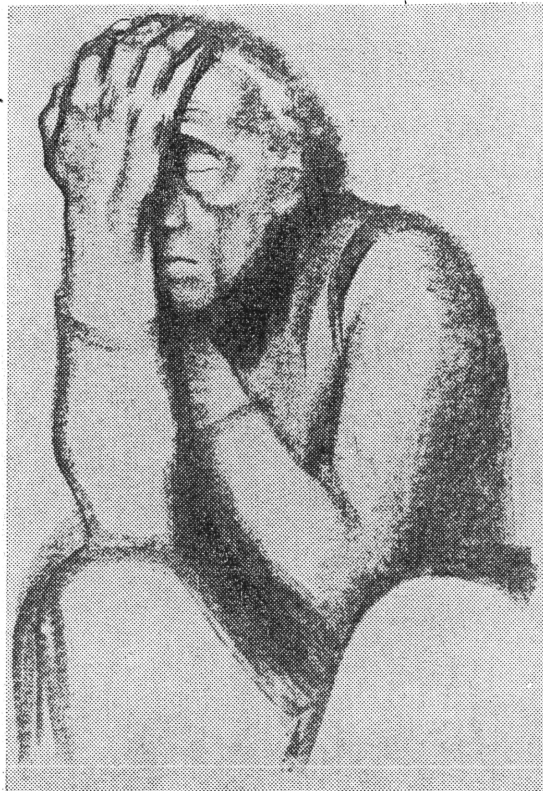
In a letter written shortly before his death, the master asked me what was to become of his painting stranded, as he saw it, on a swatch of land lost in the middle of the ocean.

I soothed his fears, suggesting that it would eventually find a permanent shelter at the Honolulu Academy of Arts.

In an earlier letter, Ozenfant wrote in a jocular mood of his one whimsical contact with Hawaii:

"A little anecdote suggested by your murals in Waikiki. In 1931, Erich Mendelsohn, an architect who lived in Berlin, commissioned me to paint a mural for the private palace he was building for his own use.

"I do not practice the



"Meditating Woman" by Kathe Kollwitz. It is one of the German Expressionist's works on loan to the Honolulu Academy of Arts from the Grunwald Graphic Arts Foundation, California.

grand technique of fresco. I saw no advantage in painting in oils directly on the wall. Better paint on a canvas to be stretched in place afterwards.

"I sketched full-scale the mural in my Paris studio. Together with my assistant we arranged to meet Mendelsohn at noon on a Sunday in Berlin. We were to try the effect directly on the wall.

At the station

"We reached the Paris railway station with the canvas rolled and boxed in a crate that was both thin and very long. The functionary in charge of luggage refused to register the box, stating that it could only travel as freight.

"An inspiration seized me. I had noticed acrobats and assorted music hall gents traveling with the accessories and utensils of their trade. Being their work tools, they were allowed to

carry them as luggage.

"I sent my helper to a nearby paint store. He returned with two pots of paint, one green, one red. In a corner of the railway station we prettily inscribed on the box: THE WAIKIKI DAREDEVILS, BERLIN.

"In those days there was in Paris a popular song called 'Waikiki.'

"From then on everything went smoothly, given that we were believed to be acrobats!"

End of the quote. Even though this is only "petite histoire" — marginal history — the anecdote gives food for thought. So maladjusted is society to the artist that he must pretend to be a clown to belong!

German prints

A third Academy happening features prints by German Expressionists. Their brutal impact proves a perfect foil to the crystal-cool



Woodcut by Ernst Barlach: "Grave of a Child."

quality of Ozenfant's "Accords."

Like the alchemist of old, bent on the transmutation of base metals, the Parisian Purist chose his models among common objects, bottles, glasses, pipes, guitars. Style alone was to transform these into gold.

For the German Expressionists, life was not a still-life. Rather it was raw drama that more often than not swelled into shrill melodrama. Despite its novel appearance, Expressionism was solidly rooted in a Germanic past.

Three centuries before, Hans Holbein had drawn in his "Dance of Death" the live skeleton that snatches the infant from his cradle, pulls apart forever a couple of lovers, topples a pope from his high throne, to fall down into the flaming pit.

Ernst Barlach in "Grave of a Child" adds one more episode to the old story.

Compassion

To appreciate Barlach we must lose our taste for abstract subtleties. Instead, human compassion should fill us at the sight of the stricken mother bent low for a last look at the tiny corpse before closing the shallow grave.

Kathe Kollwitz is another master of anguish. Her early self-portrait, that of a young

girl dimly seen by the light of an oil lamp, is introspective and prophetic.

"Meditating Woman," a lithograph drawn in her mature style, further affirms what the youthful work suggested.

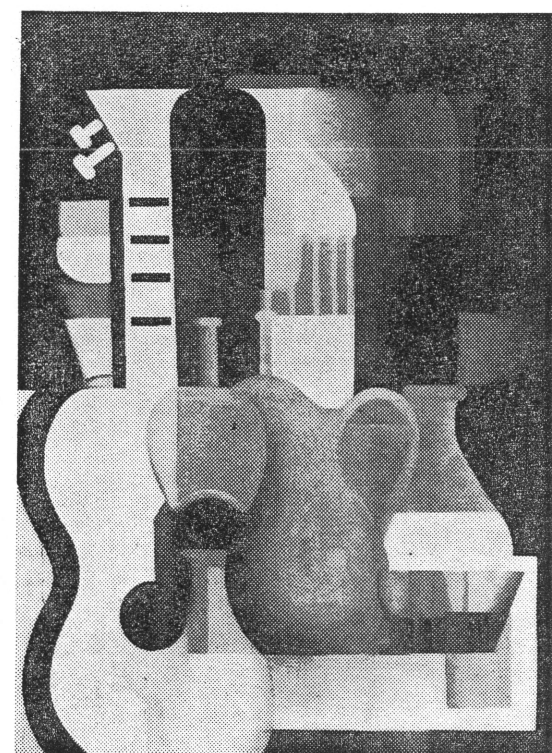
One realizes with a jolt that the world the German masters depicted as filled to the brim with injustice, horror and despair, is that same world for which contemporaries sigh as "the good old times" — Europe before World War I.

They sensed evil

What had been the subjective nightmare of a few sensitized artists became only too soon an objective reality. Europe was brushed with blood and soot so as to resemble and even exceed the artists' prophetic anticipations.

One of the best among them, Franz Marc, died in World War I. Most of the others lived to see the days of Hitler. By command of the Fuhrer, German museums were stripped of their expressionist paintings. The artists were branded as degenerates.

Those who failed to go into voluntary exile were put under house arrest, forbidden to work at their art. At night, in secret, the dingy Emil Nolde would wash watercolors of the visions he



"Accords" by Amedee Ozenfant. The picture is a 40th anniversary gift to the Honolulu Academy of Arts from John Gregg Allerton.

was not allowed to put on canvas.

Even though it flourished at the turn of the century, German Expressionism may have its lesson for our day.

With its grit and humanness, it proposes to the modern artist a violent out, should he ever weary of exclusively esthetic manipulations.