

ART

by Jean Charlot



Photography

This week the accent is on photography. I was one of a jury of four who judged a show of photographs by grantees of the East-West Center. The winning selection is on display until tomorrow in the Tagore Room, on the second floor of Jefferson Hall.

As part of their graduation theses, both Thomas Haar and Joseph Martin, Jr., exhibit photographs in the entrance hall of the Sinclair Library on the University campus.

Lawrence Silverman, professor of art at Wayne State University, presented two one-man shows of his color photographs at the Ala Moana Center.

Gima's Art Gallery featured the first one, "Abstract Photography in Hawaii". The second, billed as "Hawaii Kaleidoscope," opened two days ago in the exhibit area of the same Center. It will remain on view until May 27.

Robert Wenkam's long expected book came out this Monday. Titled "Kauai and the Park Country of Hawaii," it features impressive photographs of our wilderness, superbly reproduced.

Four events

Thus, this week, many art events are linked to photography. Is it not the season to state anew and ponder over the wornout query: "Is photography an art?"

Though simply worded the question can hardly be answered with a yes or a no. One should first clarify the meaning of the two terms involved, "art" and "photography."

Of art we know too much or not enough. Art is so vast and so varied, tied as it is to human and more than human factors, that it will forever remain the X in the would-be equation.

Of photography we know more, at least as a process. Photographs are what comes out of the little black box. Since its invention, the box has varied greatly, in size, in color and shape.

Starting as a simple cube, it is by now overgrown with an impressive array of progressive gadgets. Yet basically it is still the same camera obscura that Daguerre fooled with over a century ago, his head hid under a black cloth, his eye glued to the inverted image that appeared on the plate.

Since the days of the Talbotypes and daguerreotypes, the goal of the photographer remains the same: to realize "sun-drawn miniatures".

Seemed superior

At first, what came out of the black box seemed far superior to hand-drawn miniatures. Had they only known of it, the early viewers of photographs would have rephrased our question thus: "How can man-made art ever hope to equal the art of photography!"

One of the first daguerreotypes was innocently described as "a fairy work in golden colors." An enthusiast stated, "The impressions of interior views are Rembrandt perfected".

The French painter Paul Delaroche, famed for his patient renderings of historical scenes, grudgingly conceded defeat. "Painting is dead from this day."

The awe felt by artists when confronted with photographs was short-lived. Art critics bucked up the painter's pride by reciting what elements of man-made art could not be duplicated by the camera.

Style, what separates art from nature, was emphasized. Thus did photography speed the incubation of modern art.

Already at the end of the 19th century conscious distortions were hailed as beautiful in Symbolist paintings. With Cubism and assorted isms, our century witnessed an avalanche of unnatural achievements. Art critics decreed that photography is, at a second look, only those things that art is not.

Imitations

Some photographers believed the dubious assertion. To remove the imagined curse from their craft they imitated paintings as best they could.

In the early 1900's, with the help of textured papers, outfocused impressions and



Ohia lehua in Kalalau Valley, Kauai, by Robert Wenkam. (All photos on this page are from color prints, a change which does not do justice to the brilliance of the originals.)

hand-spotting, cameramen need not ape other media to be great art.

The name of Edward Weston comes to mind. As had the early pioneers, he concentrated on sharp focus, intensely detailed rendering, and what amounted to a hatred of painterly borrowings.

This tug-of-war between painting and photography should have come to an end when a few masters of the camera demonstrated by their deeds that photography

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The heart of the book is the color photographs. They state Wenkam's thesis masterfully. Panoramic views of cliffs and ocean, of canyons and sunsets, are none the less beautiful for being by now tourist fare.

More mysterious are the

say notorious — for his uninhibited defense of the land, just as it was before man put it to work for man's exclusive benefit.

The text, Wenkam's own, is a documented recital of the slaps, blows and bruises that wild nature suffers at the hands of men whose vested interests take precedence over prudence.

The gods are here. Man is yet to come.



Ke'e Beach ironwood, Kauai, by Robert Wenkam.

sights of Alakai swamp where Wenkam, engrossed at his task, was lost for two days and chased by hunting dogs.

Tiny things

As nature's beauty is concerned, some of the most convincing prints are records of tiny things: a dwarf lehua tree in flower, only a few inches high; a tuft of sedge grown on swamp lands; gray lichens creeping over wet rocks.

Man is entirely missing from Wenkam's plates. Recording both the monumental and the very small, the artist is as one with his art. He does not look consciously for decorative effects. The beauty of the work is felt to be his act of faith.

Quotes from the Kumulipo, the Hawaiian Genesis, introduce the reader to the grandeur of prehistoric nature, before it was trampled over by hoofed ruminants and tampered with by the biped, man.

Out of the slime come rootlets. Out of the slime comes young growth.

Darkness slips into light. The gods are here. Man is yet to come.

Silverman show

Lawrence Silverman opened Monday his "Hawaiian Kaleidoscope," presenting 200 color photographs

of Hawaii. It is relaxing after the fierce singleness of purpose felt in Wenkam's work to enjoy a sense of leisure before pictures whose one common denominator is that they were taken in our State.

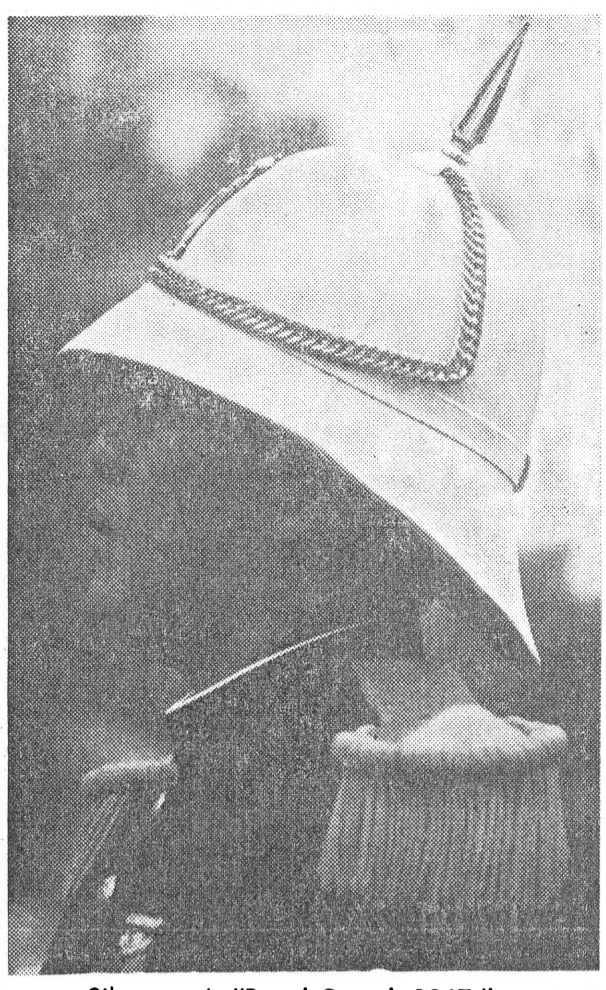
Silverman has an informed taste in matters esthetic. His technique appears flawless. He is a man of today and knows how to compose with abstract elements. Nor is he above making use of picturesque and the anecdotal.

He is not in the least allergic to people. If he focuses on a tree, a small boy shall play in its branches. Or perhaps a female nude shall lean against it.

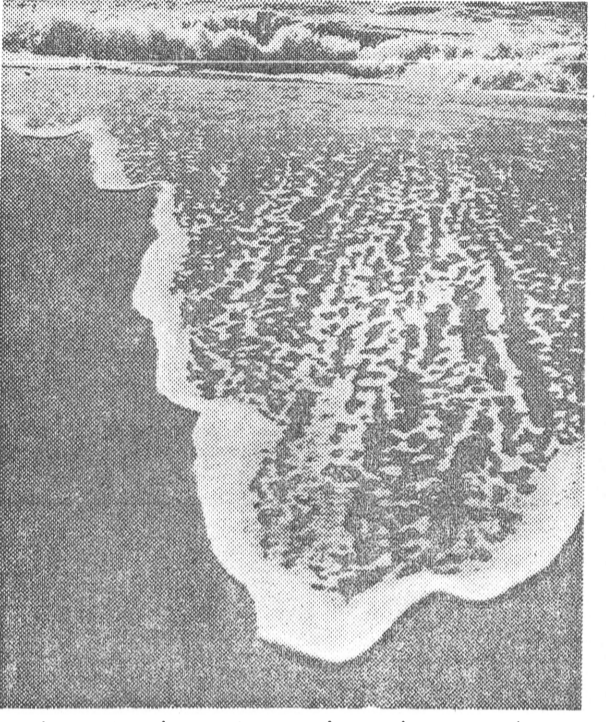
The title of the show, "Kaleidoscope," is peculiarly apt. In my youth I looked into the magic tube and whirled it about. It resulted in a small drama when, curious to steal its secret, I crushed the kaleidoscope.

Out of the cardboard fell small pieces of glass, blue, red and yellow. They lacked the glamor of what I had seen when the tube was in working order.

Gifted that he is, should his stay in Hawaii lengthen, Silverman's point-of-view is bound to deepen. Then he will doubtless order the colored pieces of his kaleidoscope into architectural beauty, into oneness.



Silverman's "Royal Guard, 1967."



Barking Sands on Kauai, by Robert Wenkam.