

ART

by Jean Charlot



Hudson show

A one-woman show of paintings by Winnifred Hudson opens today at the Contemporary Arts Center.

In the good old times when a painting was either a portrait or a landscape, her show would have been said to be one of landscapes.

Nowadays, it seems correct to classify her art as abstract impressionism with, on the one side, a few clearly recognizable landscapes and, on the other, a few total abstractions.

"Local Landscape," illustrated, is openly descriptive. Grass and trees, a hilly skyline, cloud forms above the hills, are its subject matter.

More often than not, in her other pictures, veils are lowered between us and nature, contours waver, masses coagulate or divide with amoeba motions. Outlines are abstracted, perspective is tampered with. Color alone is left in charge of keeping spatial order, and does a sound job of it.

Now you see it, now you don't. The onlooker of good will shall strain a bit to firm the elusive landscape. The effort is rewarding.

"Drowned Moon" is to me, and perhaps to you, too, hills and valley, and a lake or puddle of water, enough of it to reflect a pink moon planted offstage. A puzzling upside down world is the result, with the sky at the bottom of the painting.

You saw it. Now you don't. It is my contention, though I could not buttress it with logic, that the more abstract among the pictures are equally landscapes, and landscapes distilled into meditative visions.

Most striking

"Blood Wedding" is most striking. Hills, trees, grass, water, sky, are hid in it, but drastically remodeled. Maroons and blacks, a red free form encircled by a green one, a sky—if it is a sky—where cloud shapes sail perhaps, gray ones edged with rose.

Begin a woman the artist, bless her, feeds unaffectedly on pretty sights. Pink is her favorite color, a difficult one



"Summer Wind" by George Bennett

to handle. Circus pink, shocking pink, lipstick pink, cherry blossom pink, are its expected range. Surprisingly, Winnifred Hudson adds to the range of pinks meanings in depth.

"Tree Pink, Rock Red" is a sort of color climax. As the eye roams from would-be blossoms to would-be rocks, soft pinks harden into raw reds. An impressionist master would approve of the glissandos that imperceptibly turn rose into gray green as each branch bows, heavy with blossoms.

The same instinct that guides the artist towards pleasant sights attracts her to bouquets of flowers. Far from reciting the shapes and colors of sepals, petals and pistils, her brush frees the motif both of botanical connotations and of sheer decorativeness.

Mood is dominant. "Celestial Bouquet" is joyousness. "Earth Bouquet," in muted maroons, grays and ochres, hovers at the borderline between the physical and spirituality.

Most abstract is the series,



"Local Landscape" by Winnifred Hudson

"Approach to an Island." Color coagulates and separates, or irradiates transparencies.

I stop at the edge of the "why" of these paintings. Who could follow the cog within the cog that moves the heart that moves the hand that holds the brush...?

First show

George Bennett has his first one-man show at the Church of the Crossroads Gallery. It remains on view until June 25.

The artist is still very young. So were, in the times at a time, men we now call Old Masters. To attempt a paternalistic attitude in this review would suit neither the man nor his work. There is nothing hesitant or tentative about it.

Bennett is gentle and reserved. His work is blustering and loud. When I asked him if he could add a spoken footnote to his visual statements, he politely declined. So I am on my own.

I had just left behind the shimmer of flowering trees, the reflection of the moon in a pool, the ever-changing pictures that clouds brush high in the sky. To enter Bennett's world is like crossing Dante's Gates of Hell.

Hudson's world is based on colors. Typically, Bennett sights his world in stark black and white.

Winnifred Hudson's world is a good one to dwell in. From the world of George Bennett there is no escape.

For him, objective nature is summed up in the human body, specifically the nude. His eye expects confirmation from his other senses. His world is a sort of blind man's world, wherein only these things achieve reality that remain within tactile range.

By passed

This approach bypasses what painterly problems concern illusive space, linear and atmospheric perspective.

His subject, the nude body, fills the picture to the brim

with even less leeway than has a fat man's corpse jammed in a poor man's coffin.

In art, a world conceived as mostly made of human bodies is not new. The ancient Greeks similarly carved and painted bodies, to the detriment of hills, trees, flowers and sunsets.

And though ancient Greeks, as do all human animals, clothed themselves as a protection against rain and cold, the classical artist remained hypnotized by the nude.

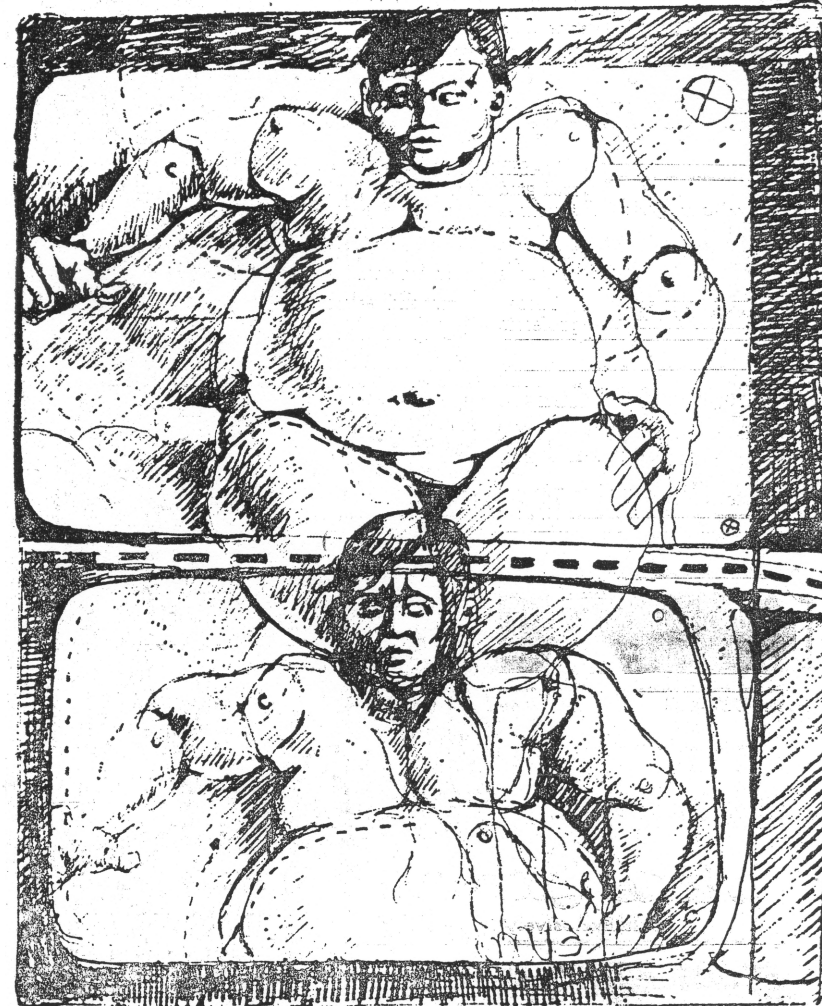
The resemblance stops there. Man partakes of beast and god. The classicist emphasizes man's likeness to his gods. Bennett dwells on man's animality.

So did the medieval artisans, stone cutters or stained glass joiners. Their Adams and their Eves, hiding their shame behind giant fig leaves, are far from Godlike. Death hovers over their gawky sinful bodies, with jutting ribs, knock-kneed and pigeon-toed.

Bennett is closer to the medieval artist than to the Greek, but his concept of anatomy holds no moralizing tones.

Carcasses

The bodies he chooses to paint are rather carcasses fit to hang from butchers' hooks.



"The Polish Rider" by George Bennett

In most of his paintings and constructions, man is drawn and quartered, limbless, castrated, disembowelled.

Stencilled on his skin in capital letters are instruc-

tions concerning use. Between shoulders and head, "CUT HERE". In a triptych of mutilated torsos, each is stamped with a reassuring "U.S. INSPECTED."

To this art can be applied a term that nowadays is far from negative: non-art.

A tondo, "Summer Wind", reproduced here, differs from the rest of the works in intent. Crudity gives way to something close to tenderness. The frontal presentation, the stylized gesture, remind one of Chinese ancestral portraits. In this one painting, the soul reintegrates its much maligned abode.

Is Bennett's nightmarish view of the world a corollary of blustering youth? Can his pessimism be dismissed as part of the pangs of growth? It would be reassuring to think so. But is it so?

The world the artist was born in, and that he finds lacking in glamor, is not one

of his own making. We, his elders, molded it to our own image. Not entirely unjustly, he holds us responsible for its squalor.

Though we airily pretend not to notice, it is a world of madness and of death. On the University campus, where Bennett studies and paints, war reaches and muddles one's homework with unacademic horrors.

Bennett's choice of esthetics is not entirely his own. We, his elders, are, willy-nilly, his collaborators.



"Celestial Bouquet" by Winnifred Hudson