

ART

by Jean Charlot



The Tennent show

Madge Tennent's works are rarely seen, unless it be on a visit to the Tennent Foundation. A monumental show of her paintings is on view at the new offices of the Hawaiian Savings and Loans Association, until August 4.

This event is a must for the art lover and for the lover of things Hawaiian as well.

Madge Tennent is one of those rare artists so identified with a locale and its way of life that the two cannot be pulled apart.

Few artists stand in the History of Art as definitive symbols of a country.

Velazquez forever speaks for Spain. Fame casts Vermeer as a burgher of Delft.

Renoir's rosy nudes could only come to flower in France.

Kamaaina artists

Those artists were kamaaina, born on the land. With them no other choice was involved than the acceptance of this simple fact.

Other masters tie their fate and subsequent fame to a land of their adoption.

El Greco's Spanish-ness was acquired the hard way. Twice he was an exile, first from his native Greece and then from Italy.

Because of this, the Greek master sees Spain with the intensity of a convert.

The drama of his errant life loads the skies he paints over the Toledo landscape

with storm clouds that native Toledans failed to perceive.

Gauguin and Tahiti remain bracketed in our memory because of the Frenchman's own wilful flight from civilization

The beauty of his South Seas paintings owes as much to his dream of a primitive Eden as it does to what sights greeted him at landing.

She chooses Isles

Gauguin chose Tahiti. El Greco chose Spain. Madge Tennent chooses Hawaii.

In her case, perhaps it would be more exact to say that Hawaii chose her. It beckoned to her, asked her through its palms, its leis, and above all through the opulence of its flesh, to state its case before the world.

Madge Tennent complied. Newcomers to Hawaii should not think that, because the artist did much of

her work before the present rash of skyscrapers defaced the land, she found her subjects ready made.

The quality of her art depends on her vision. It does not depend on the fact — doubtful as a fact — that she was privileged to see "the last of old Hawaii."

Since the 1770's, foreign artists who visited our Islands had the same privilege. Their renderings, even though good will was not lacking, were rather uncertain.

Throughout the 19th century, forms of beauty peculiar to Hawaii were assessed by the itinerant painters against the cold formulas of neo-classical esthetics.

The native ways were found wanting.

Student days

As an art student, Madge Tennent learned this same neo-classical idiom. In her earliest efforts there is la-

tent a memory of studio accessories — plasters cast after fragments of Greek or Roman statues.

She also was taught to draw from life, to render the model with chalk and charcoal with exacting realism.

These first steps proved to be finger exercises, a limbering before tackling the more ambitious task she soon set for herself.

Hawaii sparked in her a passion that gave a meaning to her craft.

Going further than the concept of beauty she had been taught as a student, she veered away from the neo-classical, and from realism as well.

Beauty in bulk

She chose to worship another kind of beauty, the concept of plenty that the Hawaiian matriarch embodies.

Madge did not become a revolutionary for the sake of the turmoil and noise and mayhem attendant upon revolutions.

Before leaving the well-trod path for the unknown one, she checked her star by worshipping at the altar of the Old Masters.

She is one of the few among modern artists who acknowledges the cult of ancestors.

And because she is preeminently a doer, she does so with pencil or brush, rather than giving lip service.

She titles her studies after the Masters, "Lineal Moments with the Great."

"Lineal" is the key word, implying the idea of linear rhythm and, as well, that of lineage. In true humility, Madge claims these ancient masters as her spiritual ancestors.

Her studies range from Egypt to Crete, from Tanagra to Daumier, from Renoir to Picasso.

Her sketches

Even though not included in the present show, I reproduce two of her sketches. They may guide the onlooker to a deeper understanding of her style.

Madge's paintings already have run the gauntlet of successive art fashions. At the time that her message took shape, she alienated genteel friends by the sheer boldness of her distortions.

She stood accused of making violence to nature.

Another generation of artists came into focus with abstractions their goal.

Madge's obvious delight in bodies, solidly set and fleshed, endowed with weight and girth, was at odds with the one orthodox



"Hawaiian Matron," is a special drawing by Madge Tennent. It is from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. George Moody and in the current Hawaiian Savings and Loan show.

adventure these men approved of — voyaging into one's inner self.

Younger artists, somewhat sated with introspection, again look at the world with fresh eyes. They try their hand at finger painting.

Figure painter

This new generation will doubtless discover, or rediscover, Madge Tennent, preeminently a figure painter.

To better understand her beloved Hawaii, Madge searched for the spirit of the race threading its way undisturbed through the many phases of Hawaiian history.

Her version of the often stated dilemma of missionary ways intruding upon native ways is somewhat unorthodox.

Her wahines may hold the

fly whisk of the pagan chiefs or thumb through the Paipala, the Bible, without essential change.

Madge feels content that no preachment ever diminished the carnal reality of her models, wrapped in mu'umu'us and swathed in flowers.

Ultimate beauty

The large and heavy bodies she loves to paint, with delicately set wrists and ankles, with small feet and hands in perpetual and rhythmic motion, stand for her as the ultimate beauty and as well for the ultimate good.

Today, skyscrapers mushroom. The bulldozed land is not spoken of as land anymore, but as real estate.

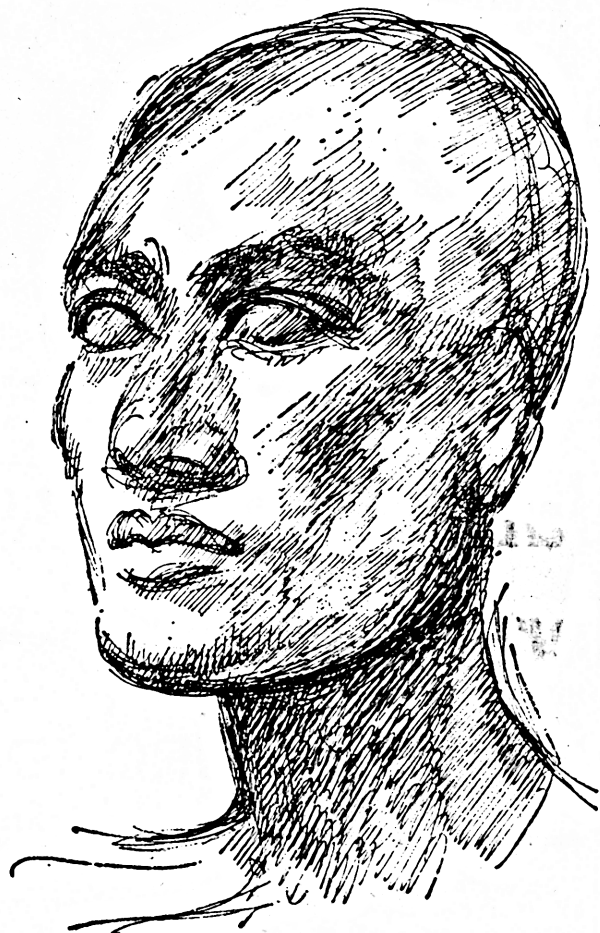
In this stark new setting, even the ancient aloha may wither.

Eventually, people may have no clue left in nature, or in their heart, as to what it was that made Hawaii unique.

It is reassuring to know that the body and spirit of the genuine Hawaii is caught forever in the generous impasto and uninhibited rhythms of Madge Tennent's life work!



"Pen-and-Ink Sketch After a Tanagra Statuette in the Louvre." by Madge Tennent.



"A Pen-and-Ink Study After an Egyptian Statue in the Louvre" by Madge Tennent.