

# ART

by Jean Charlot



## An impressive show from Japan

The second Japan Art Festival will open Friday in the Pacific Ballroom of the Ilika.

For Hawaii this second festival is the first. The one that toured the Mainland in 1966 bypassed our Islands.

Powerfully backed from its home country, the show is impressive for scope and quality.

The specious distinction between fine arts and applied arts exists only in our Occidental culture. Japan never knew of it.

In this show, dyeing and weaving, wood and bamboo work, pottery, lacquer and metal ware, are shown on a par with paintings and graphics.

Throughout, the accent is on present-day esthetics. The

give-and-take with the West that marks the more abstract paintings and prints makes us realize to what extent modern art has become international.

And yet, seen as we see them here, in close proximity with traditional crafts—their ancient beauty based on abstract values—it underlines the fact that paintings and prints nurture their roots on Japanese soil.

Pottery shapes, the relationship of neck to belly in a jar, the smoothness or roughness of a ware, exist as beauty per se. They have nothing to do with an objective imitation of nature.

Calligraphy, always far from realistic, has been emptied by some of its modern practitioners of its practical function as writing.

In the examples displayed,

brushstrokes emphasize sheer rhythm.

Woodcuts, such as the one by Munakata, cling to the logic of the plank attacked by the knife rather than to any representation.

Pride seizes the Occidental artist bold enough to "go abstract." In so doing he breaks away from his own tradition of undiluted realism.

In contrast, in Japan, the present-day artist has no valid reason to deny his tradition, built for centuries on abstract values.

Japanese modern art, as bold as any, nevertheless manages to keep a pleasant relationship with the past.

## Questions and answers

Let us go back this week to questions and answers.

Among unanswered questions, one concerns "... an artist from another Island. According to him, the more public acclaim he receives for certain of his works, the more depression he has suffered in the creation.

"He says that the depression he experiences seems to be a part of the creative process, as it is deepest when he does his best work.

"He says that the biographies of several artists reveal similar emotional problems, often leading to the use of absinthe or drugs for cheer.

"What is your opinion and do you have advice for young artists?"

ANSWER: Any creative process is attended by pain. Travail precedes birth.

Artists do suffer. So do non-artists. There is a certain smugness, none too healthy, in emphasizing differences between artists and other men.

Such a point of view is a legacy from the romantic era. Previous centuries, classifying painter and sculptor as artisans, showed a wiser approach.

## The woes of the creative artist

A friend of mine, an artist inclining to the left—No, he was not a Mexican!—used to say: "We hear a lot about the woes of the creative artist, his sorrows, his anguish, etc. . . ."

"We hear less about the woes and sorrows and anguish of the baker, the plumber, the laundryman. Yet their sufferings are quite as real."

Despite so many points of contact, there are enough differences between artist and non-artist to explain—though not to justify—the romantic approach.

Just as a pioneer may discover new lands, artists may break new stylistic grounds.

While effecting this breakthrough, the esthetic pioneer finds himself poignantly alone. There are no signposts to tell him where he is going. No incentive other than to meet the threatening unknown.

Picasso once bitterly remarked that his cubist followers could afford to be eloquent as to what it was they

were doing.

For him that was impossible. Being first, he had to clear the path for these others. It had been such an exhausting job.

## Some take the easy way

Not all art adventurers are genuine. Some compromise for a "nylon safari," where paths are mapped in advance, where what big game is encountered is tame.

And some, playing it safe at home, display trophies bought cheap, moth-eaten and shopworn.

Granted that the genuine artist is bound to suffer, is it reason enough to take to drinking or to drugs?

LSD is in the air. It is said that, under its influence, one sees orchestrated rhythms in the texture of a napkin, Rembrandt-like chiaroscuros in the folds of a napkin, expressionistic traceries in a play of sunrays.

If that is so, then artists must be born with a built-in dose of LSD in their make-up. They need no artificial stimulus to see what the addict sees.

As a fact, for the artist,

Yoshitoshi Mori's "Kabuki Warrior Showing Off."



the lily of the field is clothed in more splendor than King Solomon in all his glory.

There is danger in artificially heightening an already heightened sensitiveness.

For a while, Diego Rivera

experimented with the Mexican equivalent of opium, peyote, or to give it its proper native name, peyotl.

While the jag lasted, evenings he would wax eloquent, describing with what dynam-

ic draftsmanship, what dazzling colors, he had painted that day.

A visit to his mural work the next morning disclosed none of the qualities he attributed to his spiked achievements.

Part of the magical frescoes had to be destroyed, and repainted under normal conditions.

The artist is also an artisan, one of a very special sort.

The art object is crafted by hand and should be built to last. As artisan, the artist must have able hands and steady fingers.

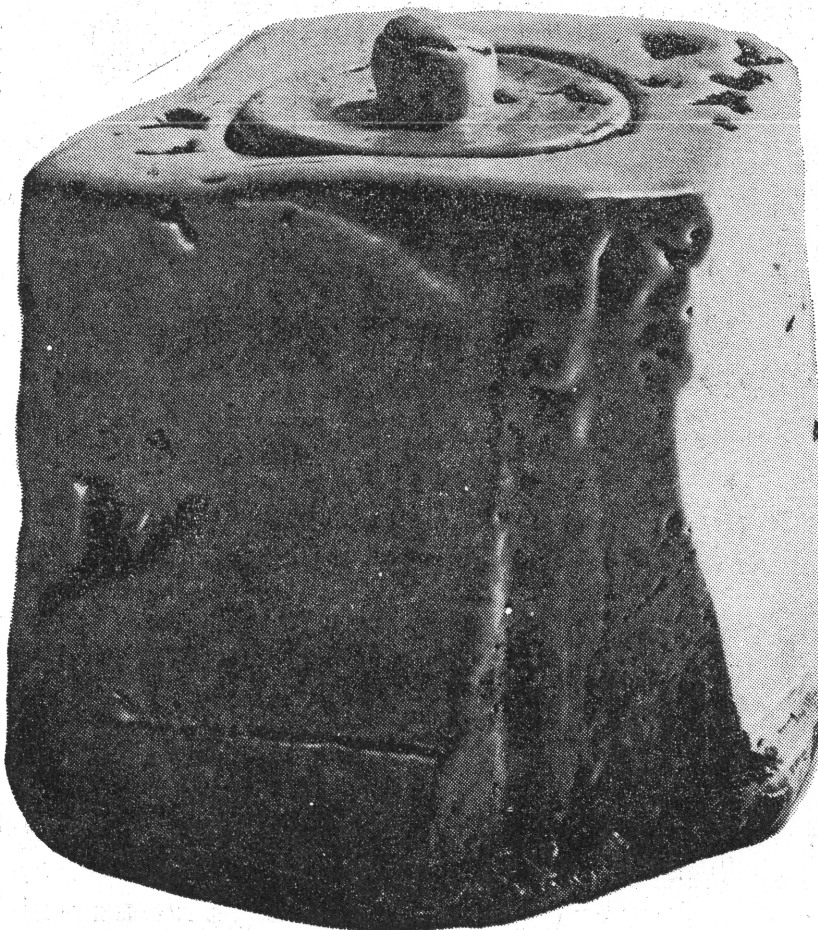
Van Gogh was a great painter not because he was mad, but in spite of it. He laid delicate hues side by side without spills or overlaps.

To do so, he must have prepared his palette and mixed his colors with care. At the end of the day, he must have washed the few brushes he could afford with loving attention.

Contrary to popular belief, it is much more difficult to paint a picture than it is to cut one's own ear!



Hajin Iwasaki's "Princess Mushimegaru Asleep"



Ceramic water jar for tea ceremony, by Kyusetsu Miwa