

ART

by Jean Charlot



Blown glass and textiles

Currently at Joji's, on Beretania Street, Claude Horan, Suzie Pleyte and Jerome Wallace present a joint show of blown glass and textiles.

Blown glass presented as fine arts constitutes a first for Hawaii. Besides, though few in numbers, these glass sculptures are impressive as heralds of things to come.

For our islands, the show underlines a shift in taste. Art Nouveau, only a while ago a thing of the past, becomes again a novel art!

Styles go through an expected life cycle. First discovery. Then discard. Then rediscovery. After that, sans teeth, sans strength, but heavy with fame, the now historical style is put to pasture in the cool quietude of museums.

Rediscovery of art form

Today, we witness the rediscovery of Art nouveau, also called, ca. 1900, Modern Style.

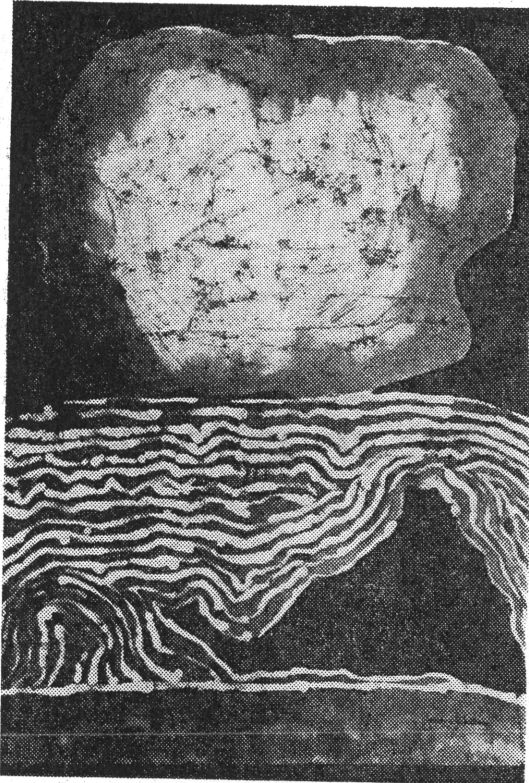
Throughout the 19th century, as far as applied arts were concerned, adapting older styles was the rule.

Hatched at the dawn of the century, Empire style pillaged Egypt, Pompei and Herculanium.

Ca. 1820, the Romantics reappraised the Gothic. Its tracteries invaded their parlors, hung with prints of ruins brooding in the moonlight, other adaptations followed until in the 1880's. Rococo made its comeback. It had been forgotten since the 1790's, the guillotine having made short work of its playfulness.

Authentic new style

Ca. 1890, Art Nouveau emerged with livelier credentials. It was the first authentically new style in over



A batik, "Sound of Flowing Water"

a century. A style not based on a style but — or so its creators stated — on nature itself.

In my bemused youth in Paris, the new style was still news. Going to school, and coming from school, I paused before subway entrances adorned in the novel fashion.

Made of cast iron, their portals featured graceful uprights, seemingly giant stems bent by the breeze.

The stems were topped by half-opened buds, also made of cast iron. Each disclosed at its metallic heart that other marvel of the age, an electric bulb!

Art Nouveau pioneers labored hard to sculpture marble and to carve wood along

their botanical concept of beauty.

Glass, however, lent itself easily to their esthetic requirements. When heated, it curved and flowed, shunning by nature all straight lines. Its nature adapted itself to the whiplash curves that Art Nouveau favored.

Classics in glass

This affinity between material and style resulted in glass masterpieces. In Nancy, Emile Galle, in New York Louis Tiffany, created vases that were flower-shaped, with iridescent designs, such as autumnal leaves or dragonflies.

As a fashion, Art Nouveau was short-lived. The discovery of primitive art, the advent of cubism, tolled its passing.

And a little later, the reign of Bauhaus logic, Piet Mondrian's antiseptic severity, made its gracefulness appear as an esthetic sin.

Art Nouveau objects found their way to pawnshops and

to attics. For a while the style lingered only in the parlors of the lowbrows.

A half-century has elapsed. Today, taste makers in search of adventure rediscover Art Nouveau. A new crop of sophisticates again features vases shaped like flowers, fragile and useless bibelots.

Forecast of future

Soon the time will come for Negro sculptures and Pacific masks to take their turn up there in the attic.

Twentieth century art is famed for its daring, and for delving deep into the subconscious. Grace and decorativeness may have been the losers.

It is good to see them make a hesitant comeback in this show, clothed in the sheen of blues, from cerulean to dark aqua, in greens, from bottle green to moss green, in purples, mouse grays and shiny blacks.

Hand-blown glass offers its iridescent hues, flecked with air bubbles and veined with metallic glitters.

Shunning symmetry, shunning to an extent the stolid laws of gravity, these glass sculptures freeze solid the viscous forms acquired in the furnace.

In Hawaii, with heat as their common denominator, some of these free forms suggest lava flows.

Of petals and sepals

Others suggest flower forms. Their elongated stems part at the top into petals and sepals.

Fragile though they may be, these objects d'art are uncommonly blunt in their assertion that art knows no other duty than to itself.

Art lovers tempted to put practical use these delicate creations will do well to raise their sights higher.

What looks like a flask may lack an opening at the top to pour from. What looks like a vase will not hold water for lack of a bottom.

If not a flask, if not a vase, then what are they? They remind me of the retorts and alambics said to clutter the dimly lit workshops of alchemists intent on transmut-

ing base metals into gold.

Even this romantic comparison would make our artists in glass wince. They wish us to see these pieces as glass sculptures to be appreciated, as are other sculptures, for abstract relationships of form.

Surfaces and space

There is however a difference. Unlike stone or bronze, glass sculpture allows one to apprehend simultaneously both the outer surface and the space inside.

As if powered with a kind of X-ray, our eye not only is able to caress the outer skin, but also to voyage through the sculpture's inner structure.

Shown jointly with the blown glass are textiles, batiks by Jerome Wallace. Rich in color and astutely composed, these batiks are in no way a lesser art than if they were achieved in the more hallowed technique of oil painting.

Wallace works in the abstract expressionist idiom, broadly accepted and expected today. Even though a winner at it, the artist refuses to take this game of abstract art too seriously.

His titles, conceived in the cool aftermath that follows the heat of creation, make gentle fun of his own work, "Also Spanish Dancers get Old." "He said his Name was Kip."

Distinctive color moods

Wallace has two distinct color moods. The one makes blatant use of chemical dyes, electric orange, neon green, shocking pink.

The other leans to sober



Suzie Pleyte's sculptures in glass.

ochres, fawn brown and indigo gray, as gesture of respect towards the Old Masters of the craft, the folk artists of Indonesia.

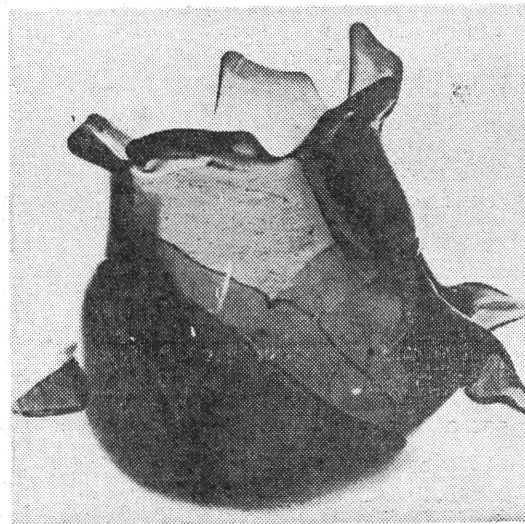
Throughout the works runs

the crisscross crackle typical of the wax process.

Modern painters, sensitive to beautiful textures and eager to play a game of chance, have attempted par-

allel effects by throwing the paint, by dripping.

Consciously achieved, the results are rarely as convincing as those naturally achieved in batik.



Claude Horan's dark blue vase.