

ART

by Jean Charlot



Pictures by a young artist

An exhibition of drawings by John Wisnosky is current until September 28 at the Church of the Crossroads Gallery.

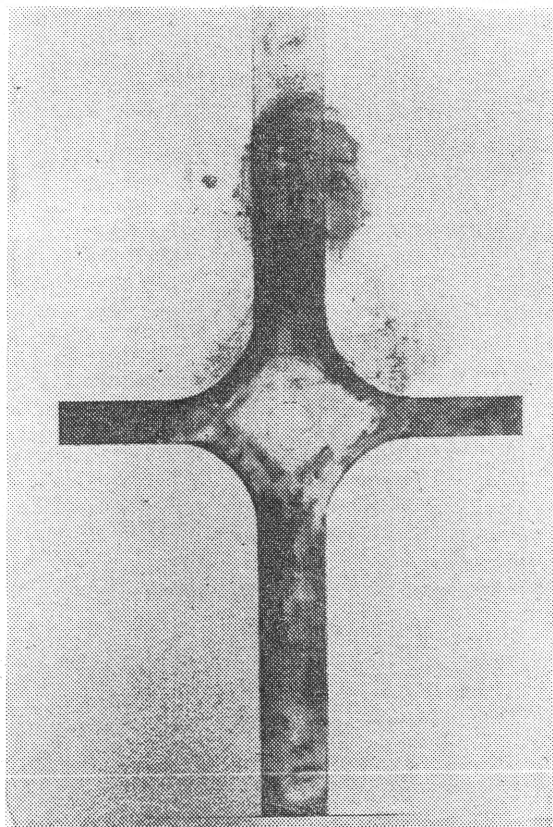
Still in his twenties, the artist is on the faculty of the University Art Department. He also has been most active in our community.

Last February, together with Duane Preble, he presented an unusual exhibition, "Harvest," at the Contemporary Arts Gallery.

Middens are the refuse heaps that mark sites of prehistoric dwellings. Archeologists treasure them beyond gold.

"Harvest" presented a contemporary midden, a collection of what disposable items mark the sites of metropolitan man's dwellings.

Wisnosky also was the organizer of the learned show of kinetic art presented this summer at the East-West Center, as part of the Festival of the Arts of this Century.



Wisnosky's "The Beautiful People: Birth"

All before his time

For an artist in his twenties, it is natural that what older men treasure as modern art should smack of the past.

As far as Wisnosky is concerned, Abstract Expressionism, antedating as it does his birth, takes its place in the crypts of history.

A few years ago, Alfred Barr, a major taste-maker, boldly prophesied what the next form of art would be. "Figure painting of a severe nature was in the cards for the near future."

The near future that Barr spoke of has become our present. The reappearance of the figure in art is now a fact.

Barr erred only when he guessed that the figure would be clothed in a severe style. The wiry line of a Mantegna, the exacting boundaries set by an Albrecht Durer, are in no way a part of Wisnosky's approach.

From the previous generation he has inherited a fondness for the laws of chance and for accidental happenings. His technique, a sophisticated version of collage,

also pays obeisance to the masters of the near past.

The development of collage

Collage, as the cubists practiced it, was indeed a primitive affair. They stuck on their drawings pieces of newspaper and wallpaper.

Surrealist Max Ernst refined collage. With scissors and pastepot he assembled in nightmarish tableaux cut-outs clipped from 19th century periodicals.

Wisnosky also lifts the printed image from magazine or newspaper, but does so by transfer. His wax or varnish method is a sort of decal, somewhat akin to the Chinese technique of stone rubbing.

For those who want the artist to sweat as he works, I should add that the shortcut implied — borrowing the figure from outside sources — is more apparent than real.

Both before and after transfer, handmade additions to the borrowed image add *mana*, spiritual entity,

to what started as a news photograph, a fashion shot, or a morgue mug.

However elaborated, the handmade additions are never blatant. They reinforce rather than contradict the original image. The style of the drawing remains photographic.

Because of that, somewhat wistful reminiscences are in order. Outspoken textbook writers like to present the story of modern art as if it was the script of a grade B Western.

Bad guys and good guys

The realists are cast in the role of bad guys. Fighting under the banner of distortion and abstraction, the good guys have the quickest trigger fingers.

The fight over and the corpses buried, there is great rejoicing. Objective nature has been altogether thrown into the outer night. In the studios abstract art reigns sovereign.

But not forever, it now ap-

pears. A younger generation of artists will not live by the script, satisfying though it was for a previous generation.

Wisnosky, though obviously a good guy, prefers to express himself in an idiom based on photographs. To understand his art, we find ourselves swung back to an appreciation of nearly total realism.

The surrealists were first to bring back subject matter, and to make use of its literary connotations. They were fond of the shock treatment. Superposing the Venus of Milo and a bunch of bananas, sheltering a skull under an umbrella, they forced the spectator into pairings of thoughts dream-like, nightmare-like.

Wisnosky's comments need not the expanse of dreamlands to vent their spleen. The world his elders provided, the world in which he works hard at raising his young family, is all the nightmare he needs to spark his art. His glosses remain closer to newspaper factual reports than to the *terra incognita* of a Freud.

He is a gentle artist

Even though he finds himself hardly at ease in this world, there is a gentleness in the artist's reproof. It is instructive to compare his comments on women with those of an older expressionist.

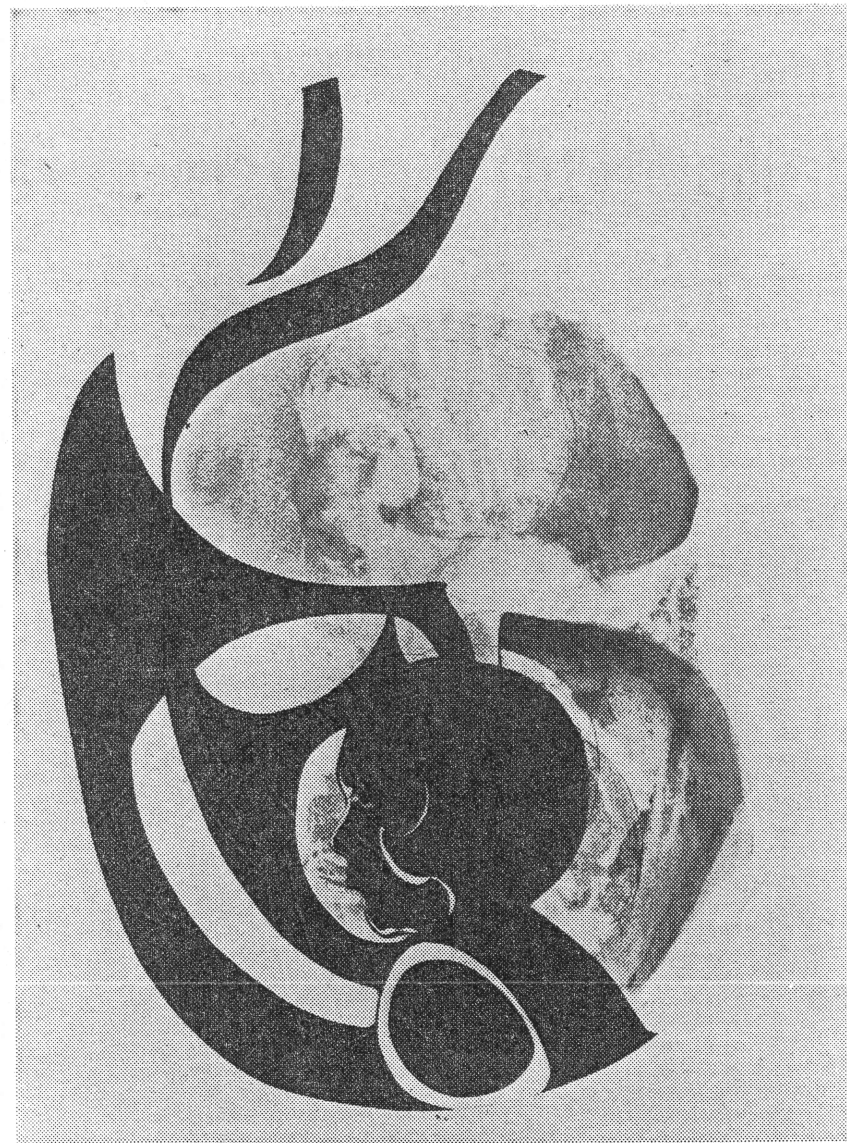
Willem de Kooning works himself into a frenzy to depict women as monsters. Wisnosky has milder comments.

His anti-Eros images allow elegance to the bodies he attacks. "The Eve of St. Shrimpton," "The Feast of St. Shrimpton," carry echoes of Leonardo da Vinci, but Wisnosky refuses to sharpen the scalpel of the Renaissance anatomist.

Instead, his probings are more astrological than anatomical. Woman, even as he dissects her, remains both pretty and aloof.

"Also Hawaii" is a series of comments by a newcomer. It plays low the things that, in Hawaii, the malihini found "as advertised." Instead it is a list of things not expected.

In "Caprice," Kamehame-



Wisnosky's "Could Be, Susie"

ha the Great broods, wrapped in his chiefly black tapa cloak, while skyscrapers scrape the skies of his beloved Islands.

In "The Air," over the Island with its sunbathed visitors, a helicopter collides with a butterfly.

In "Zoning Ordinance," coconut tree and heavy truck each stakes its claim. "Aliis" range from Father Damien embracing a leper to Don Ho, to a helmeted soldier shooting his bazooka.

Totally involved

Wisnosky's style remains impersonal and yet, as an artist and as a man, he is totally involved in his art.

In "Birth" the layout adopts the form of a cross. Infant heads are scattered over it. Says Wisnosky: "I started the drawing before our baby was born. It was

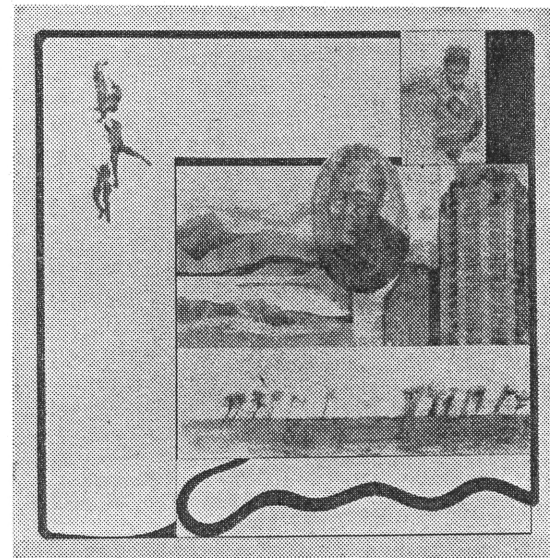
born at Kaiser Hospital. They let me right in the delivery room.

"I finished the drawing after that. Yes, the head of the infant in the upper arm of the cross looks like my baby. No, that head was not a transfer. It was entirely hand drawn."

Wisnosky is confused by the many confusing things that his elders have pushed out of sight, under a mental rug. One of these is the problem of the haves versus the have-nots.

He chokes somewhat, reading reports of lavish parties to which are invited only the halves, dubbed in journalese "The Beautiful People."

If the artist had to choose between the much favored Beautiful People and the much maligned Flower Children, his aloha would doubtless go to the have-nots.



"Also Hawaii: Caprice" by Wisnosky