

ART

by Jean Charlot

Advertising art show

Currently, at the Contemporary Arts Center, the 11th Annual Exhibition of Advertising Art and Design.

Commercial art need in no way apologize to the Fine Arts for its existence. In our society, it is in fact the commercial artist that comes closest to fulfilling the role of the artist as seen throughout most of recorded history.

The artist of, let us say, the Italian Renaissance, would have ill understood what makes his modern colleague tick.

Today, the Fine Arts artist works erratically, at the urge of his inspiration or at a nudge of his subconscious.

The fact that there may be no known demand for his product seems to him irrelevant.

In olden times, the artist's role was that of an artisan. He took his place unequivocally in a society that felt some need for his specialized goods.

In the old list of accounts, we see master artists—those we now enshrine as Old Masters—working at the beck and call of patrons.

No job related to the painter's craft was beneath a

painter's dignity.

Were there a joust in the offing, the painter decorated with coat-of-arms shields and horses' trappings.

Hurried art for a ruler

Did a town expect a king or emperor to pass through it, carpenters hurriedly raised arches of triumph while painters, no less hurriedly, decorated the flimsy constructions with devices and figures in praise of the V.I.P.

Such jobs helped an artist to make a living and raise a family. Works of this kind

were ephemeral. Painted in glue tempera on unprimed muslin, they were expected to be torn apart and forgotten the morning after.

As long as he assumed that his job was a craftsman's job, the artist enjoyed unruffled relations with his fellow craftsmen. Painters' guilds, weavers' guilds, armorers' guilds, worked as one. Painters drew cartoons for tapestries, designs to be etched on steel armors.

To insure the retail of his own goods was not beyond the care of a master. In the 16th century, Albrecht Durer used to rent a booth at the famed Nuremberg Fair. His wife—he fondly called her 'Dear Agnes'—sat there day after day to sell her husband's woodcuts.

An eye toward gain

The subjects were shrewdly chosen with an eye towards gain. Saints were in perennial demand as the cycle of church feasts brought customers, year after year, to Frau Durer's booth.

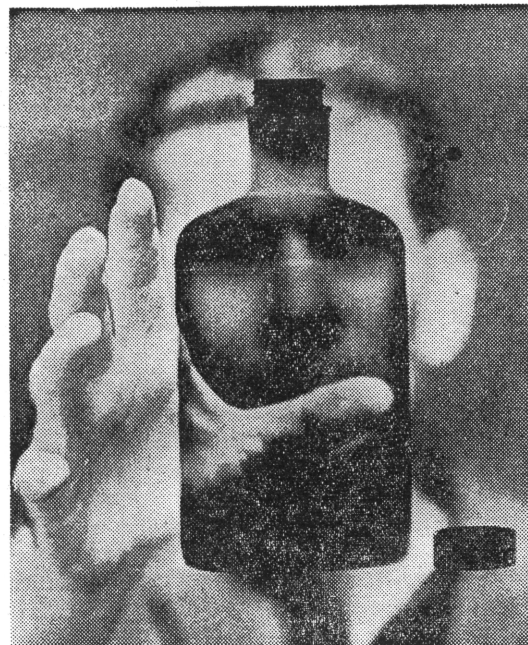
Other prints tied in with the news of the day. When the Emperor added a rhinoceros to the imperial zoo, Durer hastened to sketch the newcomer. He was first to put on the market an image of the monster.

All in all, artists of past times worked on commission. If there was a demand for their wares, the wares came into being.

Somewhere in the 19th century a change occurred, tied in some mysterious way with political revolutions. The artist lost his assured place in society as producer of needed goods. From trained artisan, he found himself upgraded (?) to misunderstood genius.

Given his newfound eminence, the artist decided that he was not bound anymore by commercial rules of thumb, such as an appraisal of potential markets. He worked as he wished.

With no market for his goods, the artist, however free his lot, was bound to suffer. In previous centuries, a Van Gogh, a Gauguin, highly trained that they were at their craft, would have found a comfortable place in society as artisans. That same society lacked prece-



MAGAZINE COVER—This design is by Tom Lee-Wallace Uyehara, touching on the subject of LSD.

dents on how to deal with genius.

In our day, it is the commercial artist that acts according to the concept past centuries had of the role of the artist.

To a larger audience

As did Albrecht Durer, the commercial artist works for a market. He does not cater anymore to fairs and pilgrimages. He addresses himself, through newspapers and other means of mass communication, to a far larger audience.

The technique of the commercial artist is adapted to mass production. His esthetic must perforce be valid for mass consumption.

There is besides a curious tie between religious art and commercial art. Both must stir and convince. To do so, both adapt psychology to the visual arts. The resemblance stops there.

The commercial artist need not be a sound theologian. It is his job to conjure out of nothing the mirage of an earthly paradise, and to make the customer believe in it.

The saints of this wordly heaven are the men and women who buy the goods advertised—nylons, cars, detergents, cigarettes. From now on they'll live a charmed life.

An eternity of bliss

The women, forever gowned in a skin one loves to

touch, shall amble through an eternity of bliss, free of the "shadow of a doubt." Their male companions shall be shaved to a fault, tweedy and odorless.

It is not for us to criticize. The quasi-ritual images given currency by commercial art are mirror images of the American Dream. They are factually based on consumer taste and nation-wide polls.

To laugh at them would be to laugh at ourselves.

This year, the exhibition is as expertly presented as usual. It seems more limited in its scope than usual.

The jurying was done in New York by highly trained professionals. They accepted 88 entries out of 537. They distributed eight awards out of a possible 26.

Perhaps the zeal of these tried and good men in teaching Hawaii a lesson in good taste proves overly severe. Our climate, both geographical and esthetic, differs from that of New York.

I miss in this show some of the more relaxed type of advertising, of the kind that is tinged with a dash of Pop Art.

I would have enjoyed seeing the original layout of the State Fair announcement that made use of language and images proper for carnivals: "Positively the last public appearance of the famed Damien statues."

And I miss also another ad, this one borrowing its esthetic impact from slot machines: three plums, three lemons, three ele-

Wednesday, Sept. 20, 1967 Honolulu Star-Bulletin B-1



YOUNG ARTISTS — Rukmini, foreground, and Agung, children of Indonesian artist Affandi, at work on the floor of the East-West Center's Jefferson Hall.

phants, printed in brutally frank colors.

I reproduce a Tom Lee-Wallace Uyehara design for a magazine cover, touching impressively on the subject of the much-in-the-news LSD.

And to illustrate my comments on the artist as artisan, what could be more apt than Tom Lee's invitation to the Painters and Sculptors League Exhibition opening.

Two murals at E-W Center

This week proves to be a very exciting week as far as murals are concerned. Two frescoes are in the making on the walls of Jefferson Hall, at the East-West Center.

One is being painted by Affandi, the Indonesian artist. The other is mine. People less directly involved in the task than I am are better

placed to comment on it objectively.

But I cannot resist speaking of the fact that art begets art. The photograph shows two Affandi children, Rukmini, the girl, and Agung, the boy, busy penciling small "murals" of their own, faces to the scaffold where Affandi—helped by his daughter Kartika, and his son-in-law, Saptohoedodo—executes the larger work of art.



BY TOM LEE—This folder advertised an exhibition by the Hawaii Painters and Sculptors League.