

ART

by Jean Charlot



Land, sea, sky and flowers

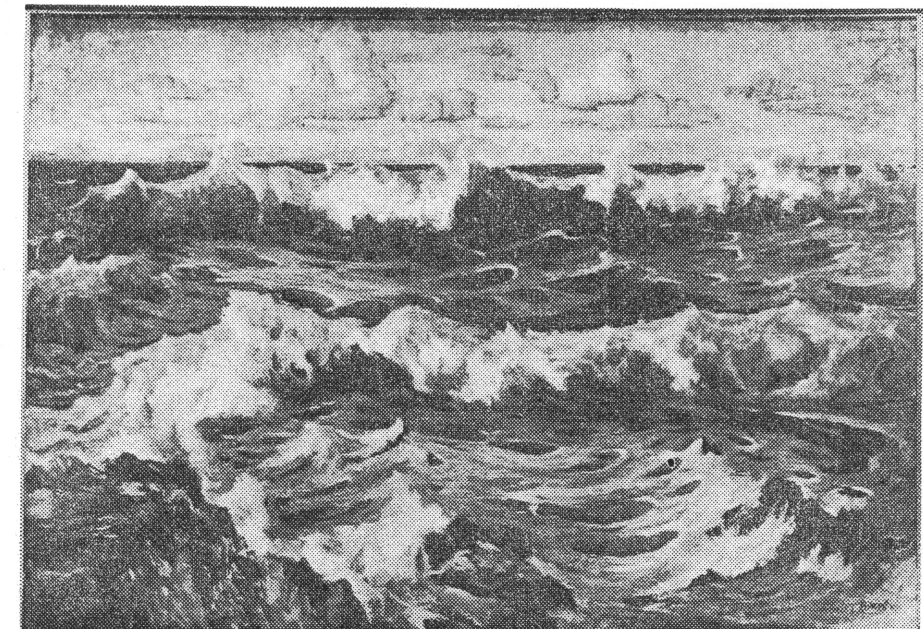
Shirley Russell, the well known kama'aina artist, is showing her paintings at the Contemporary Arts Center. It is one of the features of Aloha Week.

Entering the gallery, one feels a sense of the unexpected. Not in the least a shock, but rather a caress. It is a pleasant show, wrought with colors lovely to look at.

Though there are also landscapes and seascapes, the effect is summed up in the varicolored bouquets, of gardenias, hibiscus, plumeria, cup-of-gold blooms, sprays of orchids. And the many roses, white, yellow, wine red and, of course, pink.

Nowadays, before entering an art gallery, the connoisseur instinctively braces himself before running the gauntlet of what he knows awaits him.

He makes ready to test his retina against the harsh color chords of Op, to voyage through the dark recesses of another man's subconscious, and to dip his mind into a



Marine: Beyond the Blow Hole

turmoil of psychedelic discords.

This show comes as a pleasant surprise. It echoes the gentle reproof that the impressionist master Auguste Renoir, administered

to a critic who complained that his work lacked drama: "Already so many things in the world rub one the wrong way. Why should I labor hard to create a few more of them?"

It is no indiscretion to remind some newcomers that Shirley Russell is not only a painter, but a seasoned art teacher. She did much to raise the level of art appreciation in our Hawaii.



La Cadiere



Paris Studio With French Stove

Her 20 years of teaching at McKinley High, her summers passed at the University of Hawaii, have groomed to art men who range — among my acquaintances — from master masons to business executives, besides a covey of painters.

Shirley has studied art with two great teachers, the Frenchman Andre Lhote and the German Hans Hofmann.

Lhote codified the cubist discoveries and envisioned along those terms a neo-classical renaissance. He bid his students use their heads.

Hans Hofmann, Lhote's opposite, remains a most passionately dedicated abstractionist. An exasperated boldness stamps his style. He bids his students use their hearts.

She remains herself

Pinned between the divergent pronouncements of her two beloved teachers, Shirley Russell, if she was to survive, had no other choice than to be herself. This she manages to do handsomely.

In her show, most striking are the recent paintings, monumental in scale, authoritative in style. In the light of this new flowering, it is worth retracing the steps that brought the artist where she now stands.

In the early paintings that are included in this show the accent is mostly French. Cezanne's analytical genius hovers over such a landscape as "La Cadiere", conceived as a pyramidal construction.

One also feels the presence of the master of Aix in "Still Life," painted in 1947, a study in depth of apples, crockery and the folds of a tablecloth.

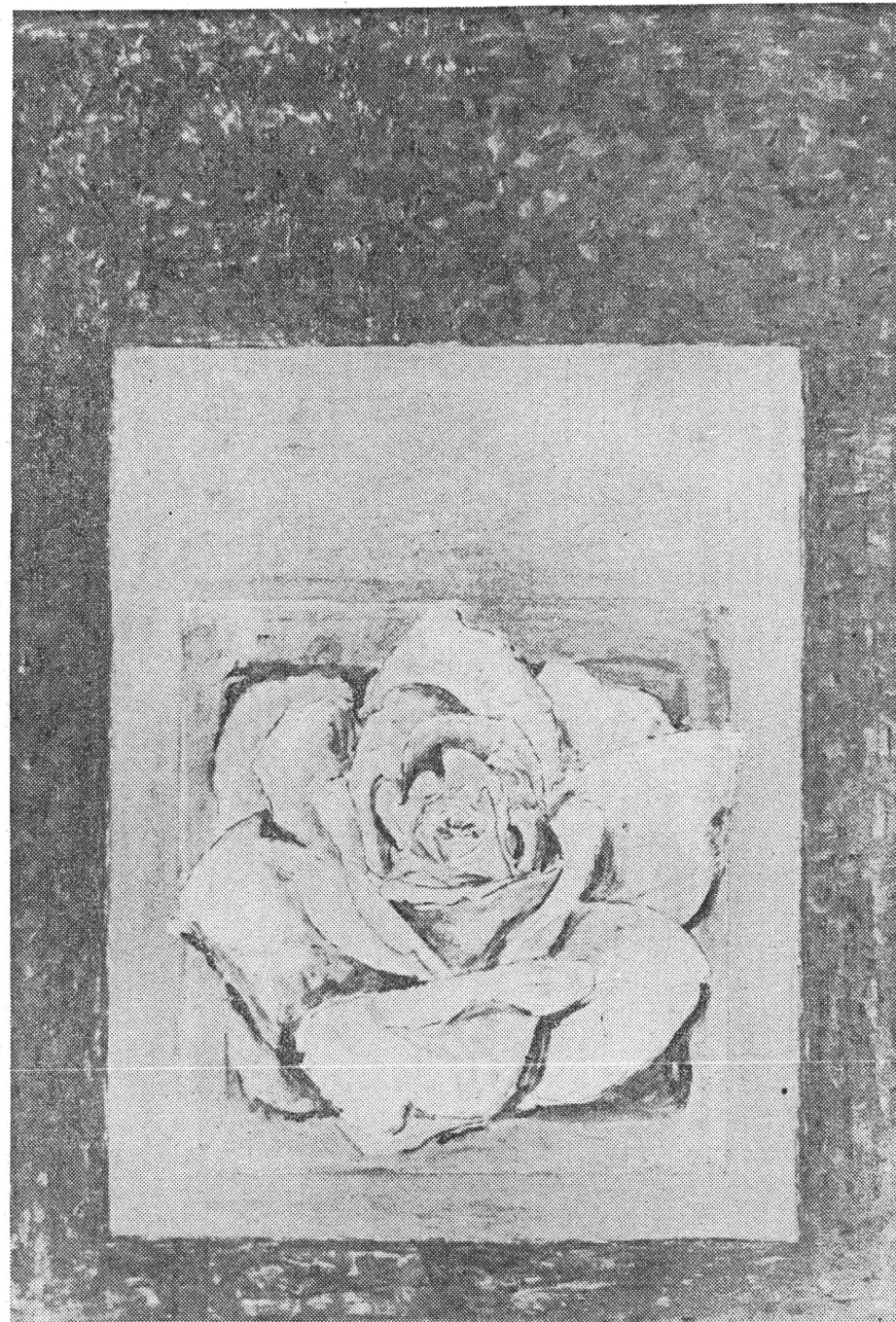
"Paris Studio with French Stove" deepens the concept of picture versus subject matter.

The reality of this painting does not depend on what it represents — hangings, furniture, a nude female and an antiquated stove — but on a multitude of faceted planes tightly knit in space. They overlap into a firm unit, as do the threads of a tapestry.

Close to pure abstraction

Such intense analysis bears fruit in the new crop of paintings. The laborious faceting gives way to amply conceived color areas that come close to pure abstraction.

In the work of the two last years, a heroic feeling invests the depiction of single blooms. Their habitat is not anymore a corner of the re-



Red Rose: Acrylic, 1967

cognizable world.

Background areas form and reform themselves by obeying color laws quite detached from representation.

In "Red Rose," an acrylic, the oversize bloom nestles in a square of red that spills into uncertain violet. The violet in turn is enclosed by an outer rectangle of dark

green. Color melts into color.

"Rose No. 2" sets its pink petals against a deeper pink that blends into creamy yellows. These merge into green grays. Rainbow-like rapports are obtained.

As this show proves, Shirley Russell already has traveled a long way, from representation to near abstraction.

tion, from patient analysis to bold synthesis.

Looking at her latest paintings, these single giant blooms full of color and scent, set against visionary backgrounds, there is a feeling that, well traveled though she is, Shirley Russell is going places!

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