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From Objective Sight to Subjective Vision

By Jean Charlot

When photography was invented in the 1830's, it sprung its visual perfection on an unconditioned public. Paul Delacroix, a famous painter in those days, exclaimed in dismay, "From this day on, the art of painting is dead!"

Later on, the first shock of discovery having worn off, the next generation of artists issued a manifesto that forcefully and, as they thought, decisively, asserted that photography, consisting merely of chemical manipulations, could never be considered as one of the Fine Arts.

Since then, opinion has oscillated between these two poles, but with significant variations. In the days of realism, it was painting that had to prove that, given a small brush and much patience on the part of the artist, it could equal the inventory of details that made up the unassailable truth of a daguerreotype.

In our day, it is photography that has to assert itself as a tool fit for the colorful

inroads into the inner self that are the stock in trade of the abstract expressionists.

Leaning in turn on each other, painting and photography proved at least one point. Be it with brush and pigments or with camera and chemicals, man is ingenious

An exhibition of photographs by Francis Haar at the Honolulu Academy of Arts through Sept. 17. Open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

enough to make what point he wishes, regardless of the tool he uses.

In this show, Francis Haar presents himself as a master of photographic manipulations, and weaves his way from objective sight to subjective vision unhampered by mechanical or chemical complexities. In so doing, he con-

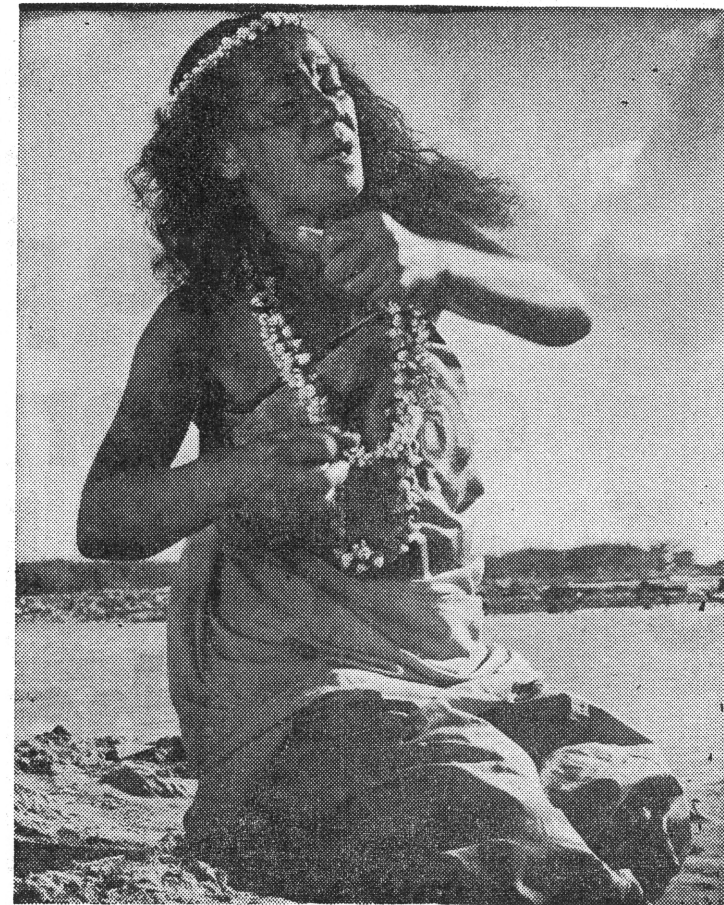
figures a multifaceted portrait of our Hawaii far more complex and far more impressive than the usual one seen in what posters and brochures bring visitors by the plane-load to bolster the sagging returns of our tourist industry.

Many means, many styles of approach combine into a report of what makes Hawaii unique. There are straightforward statements, "Waimea Canyon," "Koolau Mountains," "Banyan Tree." Here the photographer effaces himself behind a statement as convincingly truthful as that of a Daguerre.

Imponderables, however, can delve deeper into the truth than the most magnificent display of scenery. I singled out "River Bed. Mirror Image," a photographic montage. Its strong chiaroscuro, singles out from darkness shapes that emerge as if seen at the mouth of a cave. These shapes suggest the pagan forms of the ki'i, the statues of the gods. One realizes how these came to be born, not only of the theologi-



Madge Tennent



Lolani Luahine

'... Many Means and Many Styles ...'

cal musings of the kahunas, but as well of the meditations before natural forms of the man with the adze, the one who was to carve the log.

Today's artist is the equivalent of the carver of logs. Consciously or not, he has a similar role to play in our community. Francis Haar presents a gallery of portraits of artists that tells us much more about them than the shape of a nose or the gleam in the eye. There is a beautiful one of Madge Tennent. Especially her emaciated hands are full of meaning, these same hands that held the brush that created for all to see a race of giant wahines, the most telling visual symbol of the meaning of this generous word, aloha.

In "Lolani Luahine. Sitting Dance," Haar projects first of all the image of the unique dancer. Her pose, her inspired mask, her maile leis, all suggest a Hawaii close to the prehistoric, unsullied by European or American additions. But the wind mysteriously twisting her loose hair, the choice of a low horizon

antithetic to the cliché of a lush "Paradise," those are the photographer's comments, adding his art to the art of Luahine.

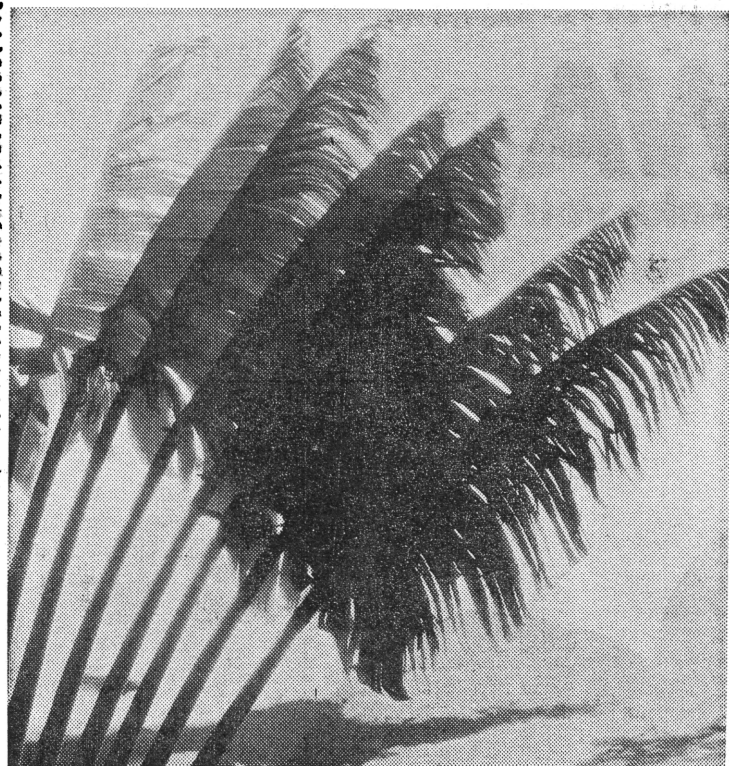
Haar is a photographer and a cinematographer, but he is a painter as well. I was sorry not to see in this show some of his brush and ink paintings, that bespeak such a thorough acquaintance with Oriental art, especially that of the Japan that he knows so intimately. Even so, his photographs at times overlap the style of his paintings. "Palm Tree at Sunset," with its graduations of black on white comes close to an ink wash brushed on paper. So does, in a very different way, the brutal black and white in "Cook House on Fire," its angular calligraphy reminiscent of archaic bronze characters.

A true artist, Francis Haar at his best receives his shock of inspiration directly from natural sights. I have some reservations when, analyzing too closely, Haar attempts art by commenting on art. Or when, distrustful of his native instinct, he forces

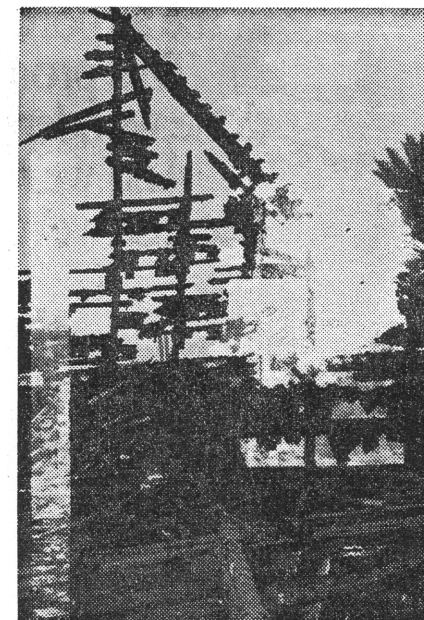
himself into the mold of a fashion. "Mirage in a Puddle" comes perilously close to whimsy, wherein a nude dancing girl—no Luahine she—is reflected in a backyard puddle. Such a contrast would impact forcefully if one could believe that the dancer stands for art and beauty and the puddle for lowbrow muck. But, surely for some very wrong reasons, the puddle interested me so much that I forgot to admire the lady.

There are in the show admirable multiplications of images, describing one form from many angles, with as much intensity as did some of the early cubism achievements. And lovely comments on modern dancing, that suggest by superimposed images movements that instantaneous exposure could not cope with.

At this time, when our State is eager to show itself at its best advantage in the coming World Fair in Osaka, it would do well to enlist the good will of Francis Haar, equally versed in the lore of Hawaii and of Japan.



Palm Tree at Sunset



Cook House on Fire