

Academy's Show Focuses on Master Painter Leger

By Jean Charlot

Currently held at the Academy of Arts is an unusual show, "Leger and the Machine," an incisive presentation of one of the master painters of the first half of our century.

In the words of Academy Director James W. Foster, the show "is intended to redirect attention to a major painting in the academy collection.

"Removed from its accustomed setting . . . Fernand Leger's 1926 oil, 'Abstraction,' will be juxtaposed with other works by the noted French artist, thereby stimulating new perceptions among viewers to whom our painting is familiar."

Born in 1881, Fernand Leger came to painting at the turn of the century, when art was understood as the apantage of the few. An esoteric

refinement marked the works of the group of painters then in vogue, known as nabis, a word that held connotations of mysterious rites, as do in our days zen or yoga. And when cubism superseded the school of the nabis, when Braque and Picasso splintered into so many facets still-lives of bottles and guitars headed halfway toward pure abstraction, people at large felt dou-

bly assured that art indeed was not for them. The man in the street lost interest.

LEGER REFUSED to separate art from life. He alone of his generation looked for inspiration at the drabness that was the lot of everyman, of the man in the street, in the shop, in the flat, the man untouched by esthetic concerns.

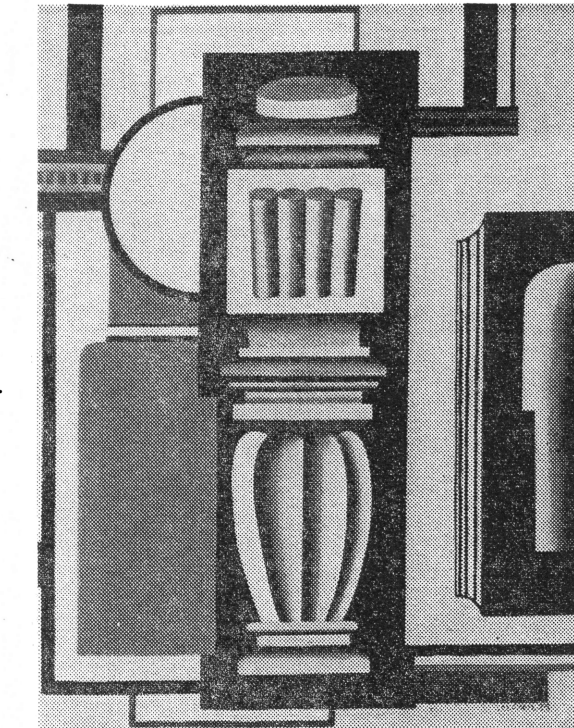
Literally, Leger found his inspiration in the streets, loitering before the windows of small shops, where shoes and bowler hats, meat cuts and sausages are displayed. He collected cheap machine-made furniture, and postcards that show doves holding ribbons in their beaks that bind Parisian lovers hid in a rose arbor.

Circus life in its gaudiness, early movies that truly were flickers, bemused him. And for models he chose the penysheets, wood engraved, wherein a robust web of black lines is embellished with hand-stenciled colors, blood reds, egg yellows, sulfurous greens. These discordant harmonies seeped into his own paintings, in contrast with the muted grays, ochres and browns of his cubist colleagues, that hopefully simulated the sedate look one associates with museums and old masters.

Leger's paintings adopted and adapted this foksiness. Squarely set, a kitchen table, a piece of plaster moulding, an umbrella rack, a bicycle chain, suffice to trigger his inspiration. He apologized to his cubist friends by stating that, unlike them, he lacked the patience to analyze and to abstract. They in turn, peevd that he refused to play their game, coined the word tubism to distinguish his brand of art from theirs.

I MET LEGER in New York, where he stayed for quite a while while the war was on in Europe. The man was a superb advertisement for his wares. Physically solid and stolid, craggy of face and rough of voice, his clothes as carefully chosen as those of a dandy, but with diametrically opposite purpose. Texture, color, cut, all expressed his anti-art stand and identified him, somewhat speciously, with his low-brow models. No Hollywood agent would have dreamt to cast him in the role of an artist.

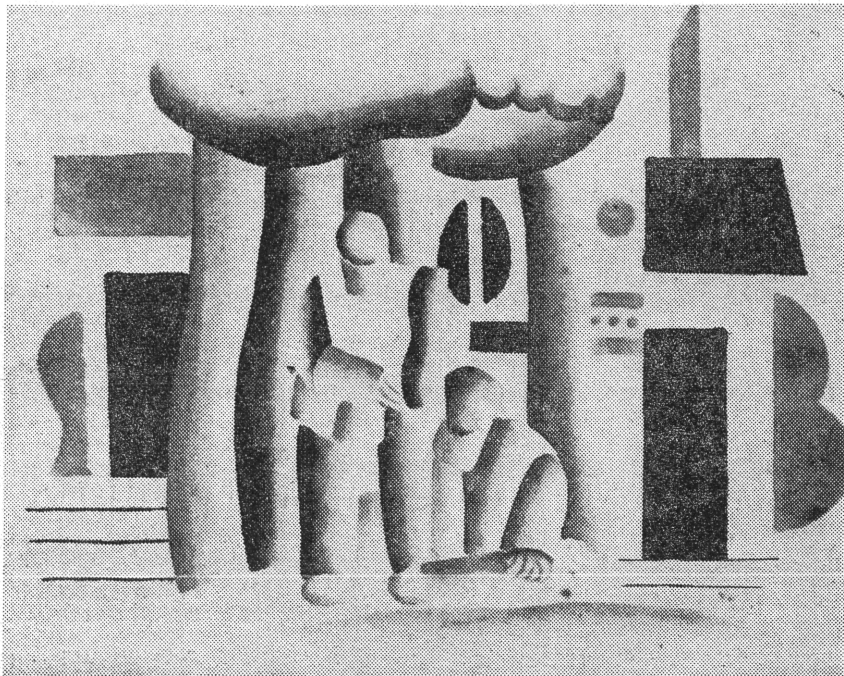
It was somehow comical that his fate in New York



"The Baluster" — 1925
Museum of Modern Art collection



"Landscape with Yellow Hat" — 1952
Museum of Modern Art collection



"Abstraction" — 1921
Owned by the Academy of Arts

was to become the darling of the esthetes that manned this fortress of the esoteric, the Museum of Modern Art. They followed him in his forays to discover the great American folk arts. They waited respectfully as he stopped to ponder the beauty of hamburger stands. They interpreted his grunts in the manner of oracles.

LEGER'S crusade in pro of "bad taste" was a stand consciously taken. To understand his art, one should not forget that, side by side with folk art, he studied and knew well the art of the museums. In fact, it is the great classical French master, Poussin, that is reflected in Leger's delicate watercolors — each labelled "Abstraction" — two small gems owned by the academy. "Figures in a landscape" would fit better their subject matter: impersonal groups of men answer with the artificially balanced lines of their

stance the cubed architectures and the tamed curves of trees and clouds.

Leger died in 1955 but the shock value of his art remains a vital ingredient on the contemporary scene. Its influence spread in opposite directions. His crusading for

the trite, for banality and non-art, is still very much in the air with pop art. And another facet of his work, such as the giant murals in the United Nations Building in New York, is now seen as one of the forerunners of hard edge abstractions.

As a first show of its type, "Leger and the Machine" is an important event for our community. Our thanks to Murray Turnbull who brought this complex and successful show into being. May-it not be the last of its kind.

Register Early for Fall Fun

Registration for the fall program at the supervised public recreation centers and playgrounds of Oahu will begin Monday and continue through Oct. 3. Hours will be from 2 to 6 p.m. at the areas.

The program will be held at 44 areas from Oct. 6 to Dec. 20.

Activities are scheduled for tots, children, teen-agers and adults including senior citizens.

The activities, sponsored by the Department of Parks and Recreation, will include arts and crafts, music, dancing, dramatics, swimming, games, and camping.

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