

ART

by Jean Charlot

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IT IS customary around this time to look back on the past year. Also to bring out of the closet the crystal ball to see what the coming year holds in store.

In March I returned from an extended trip. My first esthetic concern was for the ascending skyline of our town. In the good rustic old days long past I remember craning my neck to scan the tiptop of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

LATER ON, in Waikiki, the newly built Foster Tower was a good one to curse, having neatly subtracted from the strollers on Kalakaua the majestic sight of Diamond Head.

But now, so many skyscrapers had sprung up unfeelingly like mushrooms after the rains. They towered over everything, including the Foster Tower, demoted from its uniqueness.

Still fresh in my eyes were other towers, of Siena, of Fiesole and Pisa. Erected to the glory of God if churchy or to the might of a podesta or of a republic, their symbolical value still ennoble their physical presence. They adorn Italian towns as so many pennants flaunted high.

ROOMS FOR hire, piled up to our skies, lack such a unifying purpose. What attempts have been made to utilize art as a gloss over their practicalities have failed. Add a rainbow to a condo and it becomes a traffic sign pointing downwards to the pot of gold.

As a welcome contrast to verticalities I tip my artist's beret to the newly completed Ward Plaza. Spreading low, with diversified stairs and inner courts, it is both unassuming and handsome.

The mall downtown is another pleasant happening. When one cuddles close enough to the Castle and Cook fortress to forget its formidable presence, its approaches prove gracious enough. Despite its name, the Financial Plaza of the Pacific invites a degree of leisure and even, while waiting for a bus, of meditation.

Doubtless the three sculptures commissioned with private monies for the site will add to this feeling of near luxury.

Nearby, Edward Stasack's bas-relief on a theme of Ha-

waiian petroglyphs is a deep rooted masterpiece. When our island culture was wracked and wrecked by 'discovery', it was on the verge of codifying its own form of writing.

PETROGLYPHS ARE its hesitant beginning, neither representational nor as yet full-fledged ideograms.

Stasack manipulates the theme with respect and, in the dim light of the underground passage similar to that of a sacred cave, erects a monument to the imi loa, the wisdom of ancient Hawaii.

The State Capitol is completed. Fry me for a man of ill taste but I feel before it the same reservations I felt when construction was begun. Plunked plumb in the middle of the downtown traffic it remains an awkward giant badly in need of elbow room.

Glimpsed through foliage, approached over park lawns, it would acquire dignity of a sort. But something else is askew.

THE VICTORIAN approach to court houses and capitols was along impressive stairs. As the visitor ascended, he realized perforce the majesty of what went on within these walls. One smiles nowadays at the old-fashioned stratagem, but it worked.

Reversing the trend, our Capitol is planned for subterranean doings. The politicians, its natural dwellers, gather when at their collective work in twin antres, not unlike bear pits, there to be gawked at by the tax payers.

In the Capitol court Marisol's Damien was unveiled this year. The full-scale bronze more than holds its own as a self-contained architecture. It is as well thoroughly of Hawaii, even though Marisol did hardly choose to pause here. But artists do have extra-sensorial feelers that tune in, even on the unknown.

The original model from which the bronze was cast was made of wood. Though bronze, Damien remains essentially a log, boldly adzed, crafted not unlike a Polynesian idol despite its Christian theme.

ON MY RETURN I found Juliette May Frazer putting

finishing touches to a mural for the Kapiolani branch of the American Savings and Loans. It proved too late to offer my help as assistant, a willing courtesy among fresco painters. Already David Asherman had shouldered the task.

Frieze-like, the mural displays an immense panorama of shore and ocean crisscrossed by the flight of sea gulls and peopled by ancient voyagers.

The Academy of Arts has acquired a small but superlative Picasso, a still life from the early cubist period.

I am less enthusiastic about another new acquisition, John Singer Sargent's "Mrs. Thomas Lincoln Manson Jr." In his day Sargent supplied the upper echelons of society with portraits that were mostly expensive status symbols.

The lady is, as expected, swathed in the rustle of satin, the shine of gold, the sheen of pearls. She doubtless will engage in small talk with her social counterpart, Whistler's "Lady Meux," that hangs on the opposite wall.

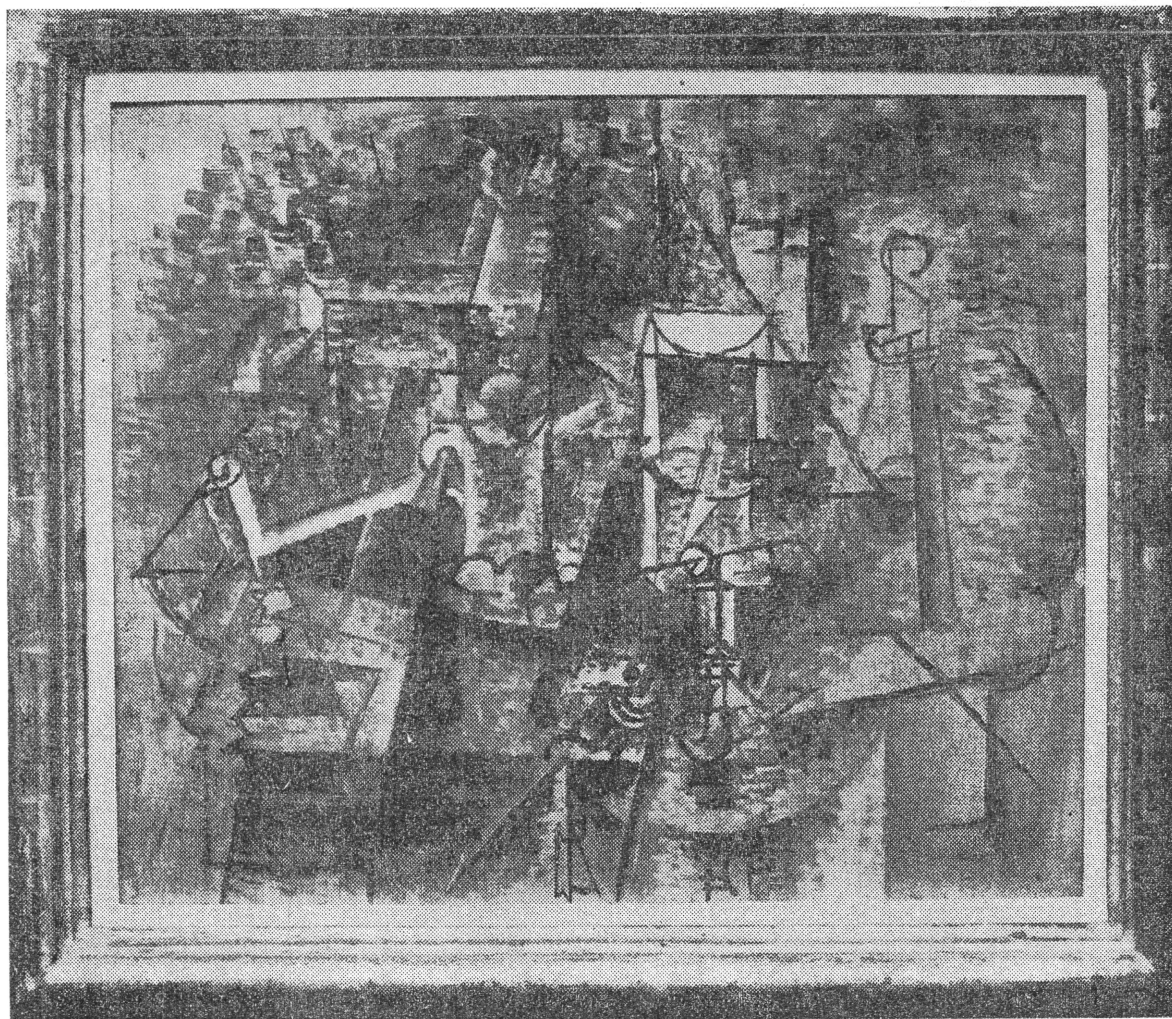
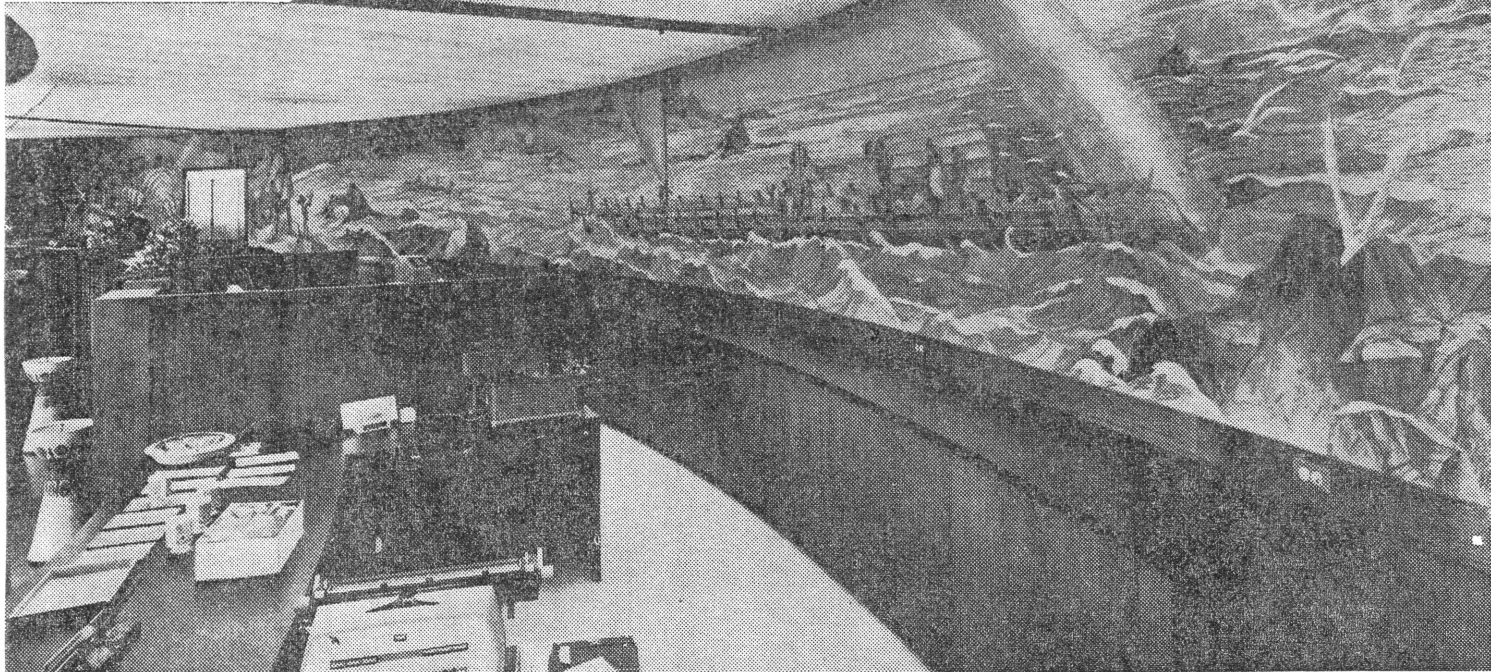
I would suggest as an antidote, and to straighten for visitors the story of American art, that a rough tough subject be added to the group, one preferably painted by a member of the Ash Can school!

THE STATE Foundation for Culture and the Arts, having acquired momentum, presented with justifiable pride its collection of 38 art objects of impeccable taste. Having been shown on all the islands, the collection is now touring military bases.

And what of the future? Last summer Tony Smith, then artist in residence at the University, was commissioned to do, for the campus, a monumental sculpture. Now only at the model stage, "Hubris" promises to be a major achievement for 1970.

Local artists have received nineteen State commissions, to be completed this coming year. A doubled amount of Federal money is bound to help the State enlarge its concern for art and artists.

Thus the new decade begins auspiciously. And where would optimism find an untainted shelter, if not in the future!



IMMENSE PANORAMA — Juliette May Frazer's magnificent mural at American Savings and Loan, Kapiolani branch.

Photos
by
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SMALL BUT SUPERB — The Picasso at the Academy of Arts.