

ART

by Jean Charlot

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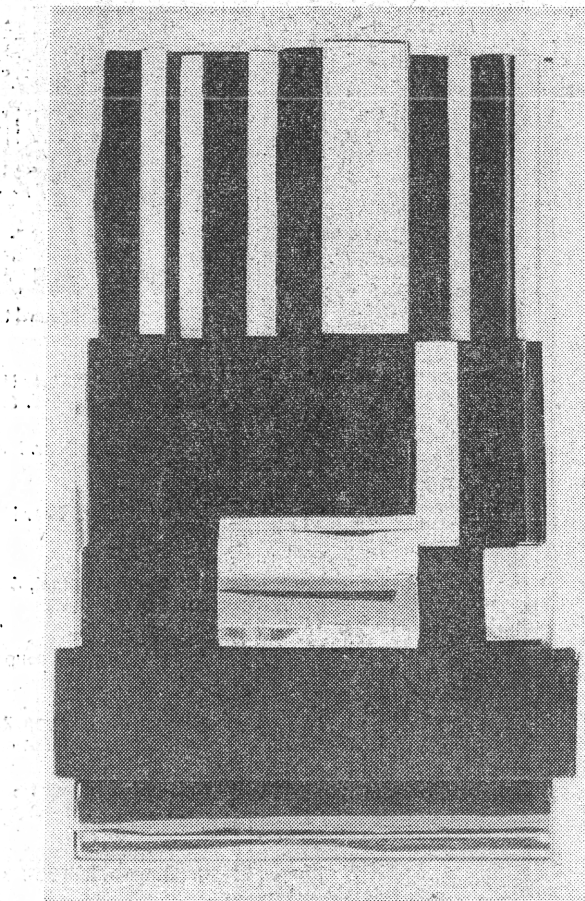
Current at the Honolulu Academy of Arts until July 19 is an important loan show of works dated from the 1960s, privately owned by local collectors.

The story of art appreciation in Hawaii has yet to be written. Was it in the days of whaling ships and schooners that a landscape of the Hudson River School first reached our shores? Did a first impressionist painting startle our community before the original Lurline had plodded its course across the Pacific? And the first abstraction to be seen here — did it happen in the pioneer days of passenger flights?

Nowadays, with the entire world 'just around the corner', keeping our esthetic know-how up to date should be taken for granted. Indeed, in this show, the choice of artists, the quality of the works exhibited, project a valid image of art as it was practiced in the 1960s — even though the accent is on an art that may blend best with contemporary interiors, which is the *raison d'être* of most of the pieces in this show.

Should such a show be staged as each decade ends, art historians would be grateful for what lessons it holds. For a start, let us attempt to compare the present show with a similar one, conjured out of our head, that would review the art of the 1950s.

MORE THAN nuances separate the two decades. In the '50s, the stress was laid on the importance of the individual. Action painting reigned. Brushes loaded with pigment were handled as if they were rapiers dripping with blood. The autography



BROOCH—Louise Nevelson, 1965, gold and wood.

of the brushstroke was a must. Impasto was accepted as the sign of genius.

It was a time when Georges Mathieu, the French abstract expressionist, encased himself in a suit of armor, the better to do battle with his canvas, attacking it with thrusts and swipes duly recorded for posterity by a battery of movie cameras.

The art of painting remained identified with the sport of painting. Along

these same lines, sculptors punched their bare fists through panels of fresh clay, later to be cast in bronze to eternize the gymnastics.

As reaction follows action, the art of the '60s settled for a relative coolness and impersonality.

The bellwether of the change was Pop art. One feels its influence in some of the objects displayed, but private collectors, understandably enough, have shied away from ornamenting their homes with such monstrous classics of Pop as are Claes Oldenburg's Sandwich, Jasper John's Can of Beer, or Andy Warhol's Campbell Soup Can.

YET, IT IS Pop, with its gentle ribbing, its disdain of subjectivity and its reservations as to the uniqueness of art, that made possible the intellectual reaction that is a mark of the art of the '60s.

The idols of the preceding decade were rudely demolished. Warhol stated, somewhat crudely, that impasto was the last refuge of impotency. Roy Lichtenstein, in his "Brushstroke" series, mocked the masters of the '50s, drip and all, in a style coolly borrowed from newspaper funnies.

Autography in art having been debunked, it was but a step to an art executed with semi-mechanical means. Warhol lets assistants paint his paintings, boasting that the procedure substantially lengthens his leisure.

Among artists represented at the Academy, Victor Vasarely admits to a similar procedure, but adds noble reasons for so doing. His

Bauhaus geometries in Pucci clothing are — so he says — revolutionary weapons crafted to mock the revels of the beautiful people they ensnare.

A WHIF OF Pop, as well as a whif of Dada, ennoble Luis Perelman's "Stratified Tower." In its lean verticality it raises high its load of nails and screws, far away from such low level happenings where screws and nails are meant to fill a useful need.

It makes its point as unequivocally as did Marcel Duchamps half a century ago when he raised a bicycle wheel on a high pedestal. By denying the wheel its reason to be, the road, Marcel transmuted the ready-made into art.

Louise Nevelson justifiably makes figure of an Old Master. I specially liked her small brooch where the glint of precious metal emphasizes a perfection rarely met with in contemporary art.

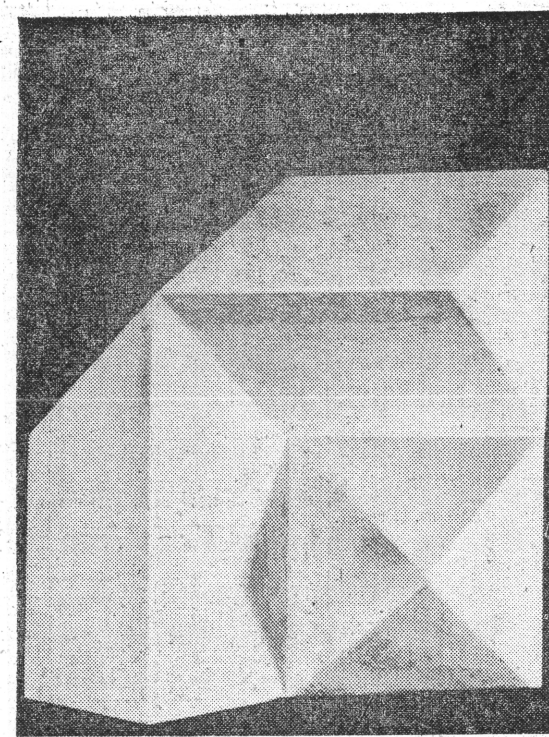
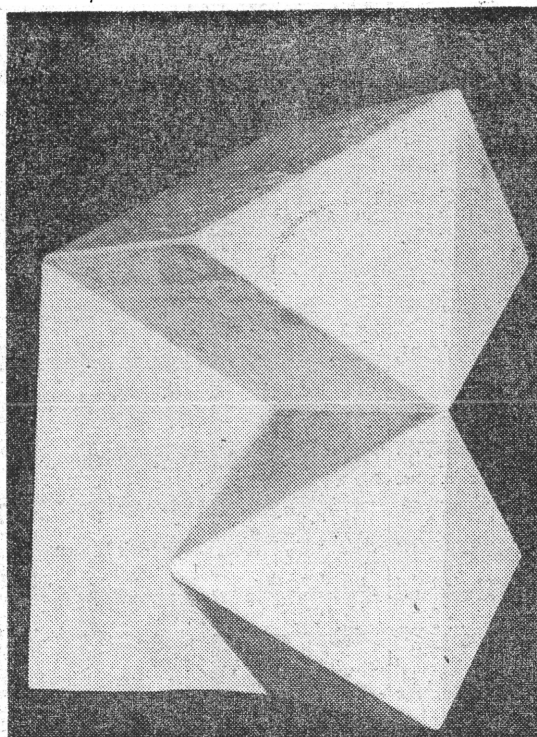
Tony Smith is represented by portable pieces that are nevertheless forceful reminders that his genius is, in essence, monumental. As an aftermath of the sculptor's stay in Hawaii last year, our State now has a chance of possessing one of his conceptions on a truly heroic scale. A place for it has been chosen on the University of Hawaii campus.

Voices have been raised in opposition. Ecology, very much in fashion these days, is brought forward. It is said that our need is for more grass and less cement.

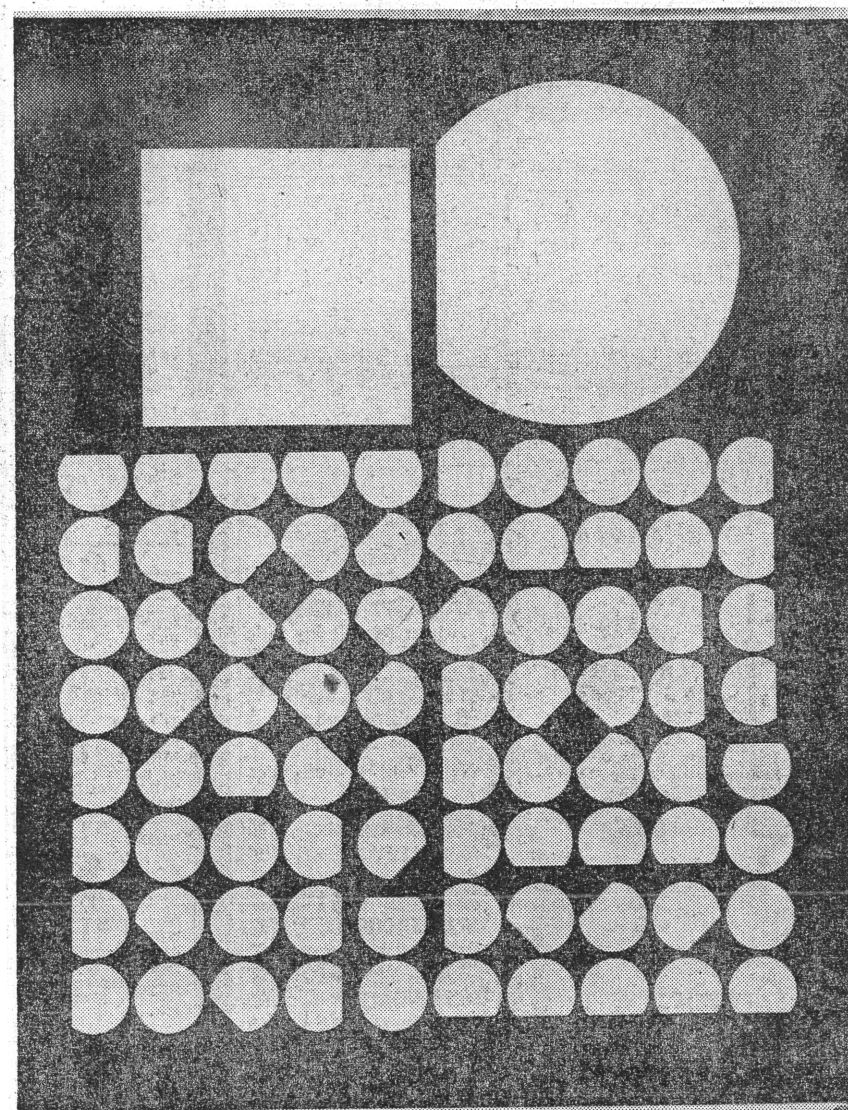
Art — especially great art — is defenseless against what appears, on the surface, to be a common-sense statement.

It is art's privilege to infuse any material with its sacredness. In Rome, St. Peter's Basilica was built with many stones, and yet Michelangelo's Pieta stands unique, though a stone among stones.

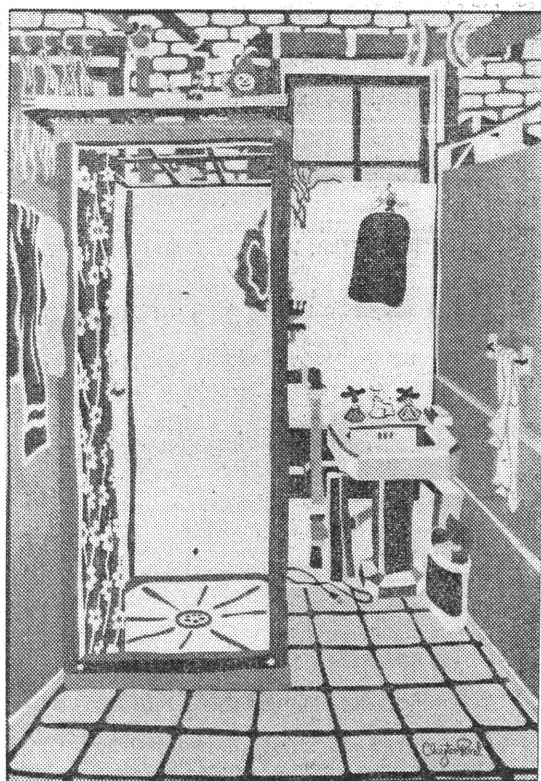
This Is Our Charlot...?



PORTRAIT OF JEAN CHARLOT—Laminated marble, 1969, by Tony Smith.



UNTITLED ALUMINUM CONSTRUCTION—Victor Vasarely, 1965



THE SHOWER—Clayton Pond, 1968