

MOTHER AND CHILD—"His first discipline was cubism."

ART

by Jean Charlot



Art is, or should be, as accessible to people as is bread.

Narrower concepts, art as a status symbol or — worse still — art as an investment, go against the grain of what art is about.

It is good news for all of our community when sculptures in public places prove to be meaningful works of art. Such are two recent additions to a slowly growing list, Jacques Lipchitz's bronze, "Mother and Child", in the Kinau Court of the Academy of Arts, and Harold Tovish's monumental stela, at the entrance of the Hamilton Library, on the Manoa campus of our University.

On the Mainland, in the cities that can afford to spread the butter of culture over their prosaic vistas, statues galore haunt parks, avenues and plazas. Stone and bronze effigies of local greats show them thinking, ensconced in armchairs, orating from podiums, riding stallions.

They are dressed in Roman togas, Yankee longcoats, bemedalled uniforms. Their faces sport Spartan shaves, or sideburns or long beards. Their hands hold documents, compasses, globes or swords.

WE ARE blessedly free of such. Sole possible exception would be the famous Kamehameha statue, Victorian in its mock classicism; but far from Victorian its veneer of chocolate and gold. It easily bypasses strict esthetic standards, haloed that it is for us with so much genuine aloha.

Our good luck in regard to statues may mean more than sheer chance. Hid in the subconscious of even our professional politicians a knowledge lingers of the fact that stone age Hawaiians were great sculptors. Adze in hand they did hew, besides sea-

worthy canoes, heroes, ghosts and gods.

Would the spirits of these ancient carvers watch without wrath a modern proliferation over their beloved islands of bad statues, cravenly born of a combination of greed, flattery and photography? Understandably, those in power will hesitate to fling them the challenge!

Whatever the reason, mediocrity is not a characteristic of the few statues displayed in our public places, be it the Mestrovic St. Matthew that fronts the Episcopal Cathedral, or the Marisol Damien that strengthens with its architectural note the inner cavity of our State Capitol.

FOR QUITE a while, the Academy of Arts has displayed in its main court a truly majestic bronze, Antoine Bourdelle's "Penelope". In tense repose, the

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trusting wife of Ulysses awaits his return. Rightly linked in the history of art with Rodin, Bourdelle, in this work, far from denies the link.

There also are differences. When Rodin tackled architecture, architecture had to give way before his powerful stresses of passion.

It comes as no surprise that Rodin's masterpiece,

"Gates of Hell," has a pair of doors meant neither to open nor to close, lacking hinges.

Bourdelle instead learned to emulate the medieval stone masons who carved saints with the same chisel and mallet that blocked in vault ribs and capitals. "Penelope", set in a niche that before that lacked true visual validity, justifies the architectural setting.

The esthetic concerns of a newer generation mold the newly installed "Mother and Child" by Jacques Lipchitz. His first discipline was cubism. He learned early to juggle with the bottle, the pipe, the glass, the fruit dish, that were the acceptable props of the cubist still life.

When the Hazen Collection was shown at the Academy, we saw some beautiful gouaches of Lipchitz that remained true to this strictly orthodox formula.

Jean Cocteau, as a mouthpiece for the cubists, stated: No more Arab killing a lion or eaten by a lion. Drama, if any, shall be expressed from now on by the subtle relationship of the design of a wall paper with the profile of a bottle.

LIPCHITZ COULD not toe that line forever. The newly displayed bronze stems out of cubism in its facets and simplifications. It departs drastically from it in its unashamedly dramatic impact.

Quite opposite to the early gouache is the psychological tension that these cubed forms enclose and disclose. The statue brutally denies the haughty pronouncement of Cocteau as to the limited scope of great art.

Lipchitz's madonna is reeling under the weight of the child that grasps her breasts greedily. The statement is unequivocal: to further his own, the child drains his mother of life. As a symbol of death, Lipchitz exposes the woman's ribs, as were exposed the ribs of the flesh-

less dancers in the medieval dance of death. This waxing and waning of two beings surpasses in drama even the romantic lion hunt—Arab wounding a lion, lion devouring the Arab—that Cocteau had thought forever forbidden to art.

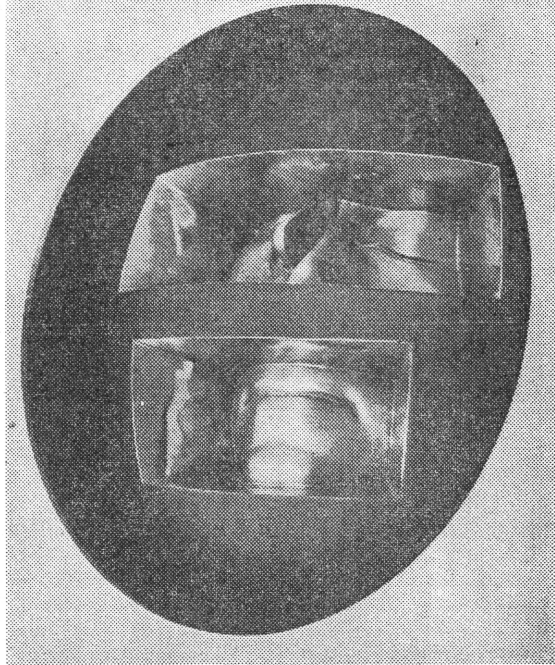
The other major sculpture newly installed is the work of Harold Tovish, at the entrance of the Hamilton Library, on the University campus. It is truly a monument, in the form of a tau cross, and, despite its polished geometric surfaces, not unlike some old Irish stone crosses in its sturdiness.

At the center of the tau, in a recess, a human mask, split vertically in two halves, carrying with the notion of a death mask, an intimation of violence.

THE WILLFUL discrepancy between the abstract pulchritude of the geometry and this realistic human fragment should not be construed as a weakness. The stress achieved between the two incompatible esthetics underlines the dramatic impact.

This monument has been positioned with inordinate discretion against the library building, under the eve of a projecting wall. With the wide lawn at hand, occupied by no more than a removable billboard, a position more in accord with the importance of the work could be wished for. Is the chosen spot, oh so discreet, the result of an exaggerated humility on the part of the artist, or of some uncertainty by planners and planters as to the pedagogical value of art?

To turn now towards a not too distant future, the downtown mall features, on the Damien Plaza, a fountain planned to receive a sculpture. May the decision be weighed wisely that will fit to this lone pedestal a statue. Why not choose for the job a kamaaina sculptor, to tie in past and present?



THE TAU CROSS—"A human mask—an intimation of violence."