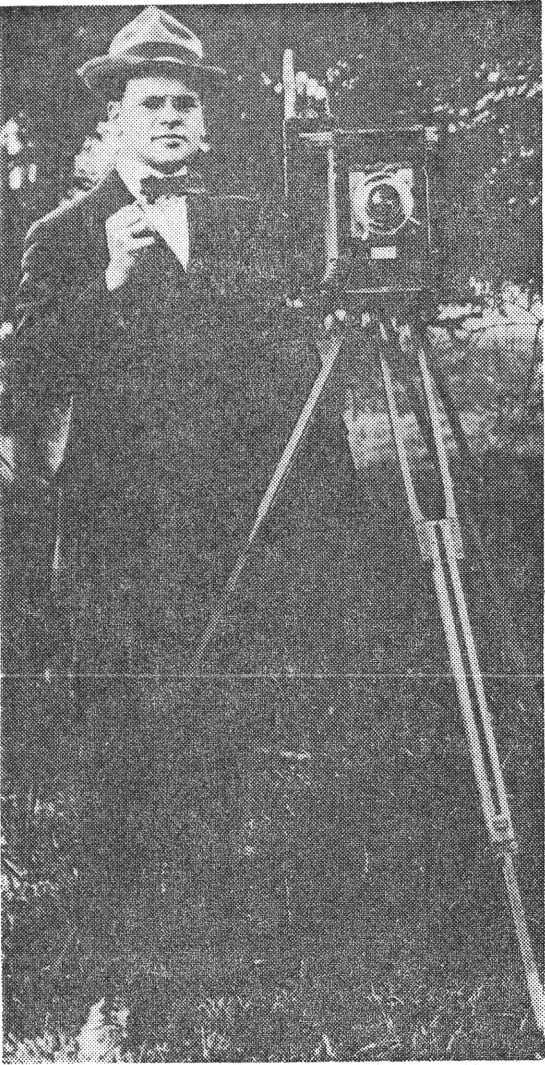


# ART

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by Jean Charlot



SELF PORTRAIT—1908—Ray Jerome Baker, our dean of photographers.

The Honolulu Academy of Arts is bedecked all at once with photographs, a forcefully optimistic answer to the hardheaded few still tempted to query the status of photography as one of the Fine Arts.

On the ground floor is displayed until October 29 the annual show of the Camera Club Council of Hawaii. This year "Photo '70" also features a retrospective of the work of our local dean of cameramen, Ray Jerome Baker.

On the second floor, until November 22, one contacts sprawled in artful artlessness a show that blends ecology and art, using photography as its major ingredient; "Reflections: Honolulu today. Images of our environment." Credits go to architects Thomas Fanning and John Hara, among others.

THE ENTRIES of the Camera Club members are high in craftsmanship, focused exactly, searchingly composed and flawlessly processed. Obviously, perhaps too obviously, a majority of entries reflect an in-

stant awareness of what esthetic trends are today 'in the air'. The favorite adjectives of progressive art critics come to mind: bold, original, experimental.

The camera craft has come a long way from the heroic days of the wet plate collodion process, when the photographer had to mix fresh each batch of his chemicals, and ideate his work in enforced darkness, head and shoulders hid under the folds of the stifling black cloth, his esthetic judgment depending on a half perceived upside-down reflection.

The model also suffered for the sake of art, bid to stay still as a statue for minutes on end, at times in full sunshine, his eyelids frozen at attention, his neck held straight in the vise of a metal clasp.

Nowadays, the lens artist enjoys unlimited possibilities. He does as he pleases, and encourages his model to a total freedom of motion. Why then is the average level of art in daguerreotypes, Calotypes, and other primitives of the camera, higher than in today's free-for-all, pushbutton craft?

MOST CAMERA CLUB fans watch Nature through a magic filter tinted a la mode abstract or surrealist. What does today count as a plus may well sour into a minus on the morrow. It rarely proves healthy for the practicing artist to trust the nudge of the critic towards a style, be it midi, mini, or maxi.

To walk a few steps from the juried entries of the Camera Club to the adjacent room that houses Ray Jerome Baker's retrospective is to enter a world apart. Most of the photographs exhibited were taken over half a century ago. Somehow, mysteriously, they avoid the expected aura of quaintness.

In the early 1900's Baker apprenticed himself to work within the technical limitations inherited from the previous century. Unknown were range finders, automatic diaphragm, roll-film and flash attachments.

IN THE CENTER of the room, enshrined in a glass case, one finds Baker's cameras and accessories, bulky black boxes with accordion extensions, to be propped up on tripods and draped in black cloth for action.

The strict limitations of the craft that Baker learned as a young man offer a ten-

ative key to the timelessness of his art. He adapted his vision to the demands of a stubbornly resistant material. In his case, as happens to a sculptor facing a granite block, restraint bred style.

"Hawaii Women on a Beach, Lahaina, 1908." sums up the poignancy we feel at the spacious sights of old Hawaii. Such a print transcends however the limits of a factual record. Baker's Hawaii depends for its magic on the artist's eye.

At the time that the Lahaina scene was taken, Theodore Wores, famed for his paintings of Hawaiiiana, was leaving our shores for Samoa, asserting that nothing remained that was worthy of his brush in 'modern' Hawaii.

THE GALLERIES of the second floor of the Academy seem earmarked nowadays for the restlessly novel forms of an art made to order to ease what museum fatigue could accrue from a visual diet of old and new masters.

"Reflections: Honolulu today. Images of our environment." is meant to help men of good will take a searching look at our city. Unlike Piene's happening that built its tensions out of dream images, the present show con-

tures a nightmare all its own out of statistics and facts.

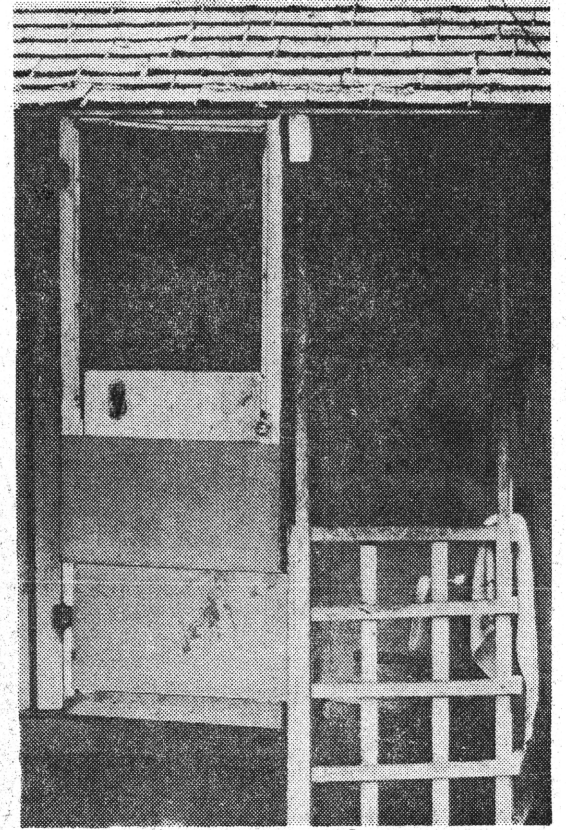
The picture of Honolulu thus painted in mixed media — photographs, abstractions, traffic signs, street sounds — is wilfully dismal.

For intellectual fare, T.V. boxes are tuned at one time on all local programs.

The shrinking role that nature plays on Oahu is symbolized by potted sugarcane stalks and pineapple plants. In this brutal man-made habitat they seem as out of place as would our now extinct species of birds, the yellow plumed o'o and the red plumed i'iwi.

PERHAPS the most dramatic snapshot is that of a bulldozer turning over a remaining patch of good earth before coating it with cement.

Despite shortcomings, "Honolulu today" is a telling attempt to prove that art need not be pigeonholed away and above our daily lives. It implies that the eye may discover new harmonies in the midst of disharmony, and orchestrate new symphonic values based on the discordances that the profit motive pitilessly superimposes on the delicate ecological balances that, up to now, made the charm of our Pacific Paradise.



DOORSTEP—Ansel Adams' exhortation—a good photograph should have at least ten graduations in tone from black to white is fulfilled in Ken Dibert's "Doorstep."



MAT MAKER, KONA—1925—Strange, that the Mona Lisa had to depend so much on a smile, while this Hawaiian woman accomplishes the same elusive statement with her eyes. Photo by Baker.



HAWAIIAN WOMEN ON BEACH, LAHAINA, 1908—Baker sums up the poignancy we feel at the spacious sights of old Hawaii.