



TADASHI SATO — "The illusion of watery film..."

ART

by Jean Charlot

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Editor's Note: Jean Charlot again sums up the impact of the artist, the painter and the sculptor, on the Hawaiian scene in this first of two reviews on the year 1970.

Last December, with the New Year just around the corner, I listed some of my favorites among the cultural achievements of the 1960's.

I singled out, among sculptures in public places, Ed Stasack's petroglyph wall in the underpass of the downtown mall and Marisol's bronze Damien, newly installed in the cavernous inner cavity of our State Capitol.

I illustrated Juliet May Fraser's just completed fresco, privately commissioned by American Savings and Loan. It depicts the heroic trek of Polynesian ancestors, paddling their way in dugout canoes over uncharted oceans. At the time, the mural still lacked its counterpoint, the spiraling sculpture of a flight of gulls fronting Kapiolani Boulevard, that carries the marine theme from illusive depth into the reality of a third dimension.

Having looked into my crystal ball, I prophesized thus: "The new decade begins auspiciously. And where would optimism find an untainted shelter, if not in the future!"

SOMEWHAT SOURED, the glowing future alluded to is in the process of becoming our near past. Yet, granting the necessary adjustments as one slides from the unhampered freedom of dream to the stolidity of fact, all in all the year 1970 kindly adjusted itself to my cautiously optimistic estimate.

Hawaii is not as some would have it, just a raft pleasurably plopped in mid-ocean as a fringe bonus for Mainland real estate interests. Or just a convenient landing strip for fleets of pot-bellied 747s.

Volcanic tiptops of submerged mountains, our islands are as firmly rooted in their own ancient culture as they are physically anchored countless fathoms deep.

In 1969, May Fraser's fresco, firming into visual beauty the prehistoric voyages of Polynesians, illustrated the concept.

This year, the decoration of the Ala Moana Hotel, supervised and executed in part by David Asherman, plays a similar role.

His was a striking idea, to use actual tapa cloth as an esthetic common denominator shared by the artists who teamed together to do the work. It also provided a bit of adventure in the telling, even before the finished decorations were unveiled.

One did wonder if this hunt for authentic material, with David poking into the picturesque corners of Samoan villages for the needed crop of hand-beaten tapa strips, would not, in the end, overshadow the esthetic results.

NOT SO. Though some-

what incongruously wedded to the plush decor of an hotel lobby, these panels, spanning in time from prehistory to the reign of Kalakaua, are an eloquent plea for the visitor to scan further the depths of Hawaiian culture.

In 1970, the City of Honolulu grew tremendously. One remembers wistfully the good old days when only the Foster Tower was an object lesson in embodied greed.

Our presently disjointed skyline of rooms and baths for hire illustrates in its own way the saying that form follows function. It remains as true to the elan that gave it birth as do the gothic spires to the yen for heaven that brought cathedrals into being.

Together with the City, the University campus also has grown. It would be sheer sentimentality to sigh for the days when this same campus was mostly pili grass, its featured ornament the fabled sausage tree!

Yet the oldest among its buildings, Hawaii Hall, remains the most impressive in its undiluted dignity.

And never will I tip my beret to the newest addition, the bio-medical building, still abuilding. Unless the problem of housing some monstrous scientific machinery dictated the shape of its roof, one marvels at this Chinaman's hat out of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, wilfully blotting out the majestic background of the surrounding hills.

Though plagued with architectural mishaps, Honolulu basks in good luck as far as sculptures in public places are concerned.

Private monies, wisely spent, have endowed the Financial Plaza of the Pacific with luxury of the best alloy. Already the architects had reserved at the base of this somewhat forbidding fortress of commerce, the Castle & Cooke Tower, this greatest luxury of all—idle space. The added sculptures enrich that space rather than distract from it.

Public monies also were wisely expended. "Aquarius," floor mosaic for the inner court of the State Capitol, ties successfully with its architecture. Precedents were few. One remembers the magical opus sectile of the Sienna Cathedral, that has weathered since the 15th Century the onslaught of generations of pious trampers.

THE PROBLEM was complex. No bonus of awe could accrue, as happens when the spectator cranes his neck to

look up at a mural perched high. In fact, here, literally spread on the pavement, the art could be seen by the casual stroller only by looking down on it or, for a closer bond, by walking over it.

The artist underlined the unavoidable horizontality,

choosing for his theme a shallow pond where waterlily pads, or perhaps no more than circular light reflections, echo the major circle of the mosaic.

The illusion of a watery film is sufficient deterrent to deflect the path of the casual visitor, who detours on tip-toe around "Aquarius", lest he should wet his feet.

Sponsored by the State Commission for Culture and the Arts, "Aquarius" is an offering to Oahu from Maui, home island of the artist, Tadashi Sato.



DAVID ASHERMAN — "His was a striking idea."