

ART

by Jean Charlot

E-4 Honolulu Star-Bulletin

Tuesday, Jan. 12, 1971



Reviewing 1970:

Art figured with some prominence in news that transcended local concerns. The pair of statues that represent our State in Washington, D.C., belatedly elicited unexpected reactions.

At the time that the statues were commissioned, our lawmakers handled somewhat gingerly this unfamiliar theme of art. To defuse its mysterious potentialities, they agreed on a compromise: the assumed modernism of Marisol's Damien was to be neutralized by featuring, for its companion piece, the Kamehameha we all know.

This monument was conceived ca. 1880 by Thomas Ridgeway Gould, a sculptor that none, even in his lifetime, could accuse of volunteering in the vanguard of art. To pair a contemporary work with an antiquated one would prove to the Capital our statesmen's balanced wisdom. Thus ran the reasoning.

In practice, things turned otherwise. When installed in Washington, the Damien did lift a few eyebrows among entrenched bureaucrats, but it was the Kamehameha that caused a near scandal. Whereas State pride made us see in the familiar bronze a revered hero, what outsiders saw instead was a plumed spearman daubed chocolate and gold. To the many unacquainted with our history, the statue, in its ungainly picturesque, uncannily brought to mind the esthetic of 19th century cigar store Indians.

Such KITSCH, indispensable ingredient of the most modern of isms, drew applause from the young and the bold, whereas the distortions of Marisol's Damien elicited from them little more than a nod of recognition.

In 1970, another one of our art exports crossed the Pacific, this time to land in Asia. For our State pavilion at the Osaka Fair, John Wisnosky designed a mural as fine and sober, as crafted and pure, as if meant for an altar piece in a cathedral.

As all such fairs are to be, Osaka proved supremely crowded, noisy, exhausting. Understandably, jostled reporters bypassed the mural, preferring crustier and jollier topics.

In midfair, as an antidote to what ailed its cash register, our pavilion was rejuvenated with the swinging of young hips to the strains of huki huki tunes. Subsequent to the drastic housecleaning, the whereabouts of the mural became a minor-mystery. Was it trampled underfoot by the dance-prone crowds, smeared beyond recognition, or simply whitewashed. Who knows?

While it was on display, some among the fairgoers surely stopped gratefully before this work of art for a much-needed mental pause amidst the surrounding fracas. A tip of our beret to brave John Wisnosky.

The State Foundation for Culture and the Arts came this past year into its own. In 1969 it had purchased, with impeccable taste, art objects suitable for the walls and desks of government offices. In 1970 its activities were enlarged, a wider public contacted, monumental works installed.

Alas! For the very many who look at Hawaii from the outside, Waikiki stands for Hawaii. For many more, Oahu sums up Hawaii. By contrast, the outlook of the foundation is truly statewide.

Though it has not as yet spread its bounties to Lanai, Molokini, or Niihau, already heroically scaled sculptures proudly adorn Hilo, Kona, Wailuku, Lihue.

Illustrated on this page is "Pilipu," a steel sculpture by Edward Brownlee, recently erected in Hilo. On this occasion may I also tip my beret to one of Brownlee's past achievements, the sandbox sculptures of the Ala Moana Shopping Center.

Here indeed is realized art for the many, its noble forms further patined and polished by the small hands and feet, and behinds, of children who daily delight in every one of its artfully contrived ridges, slopes and curves.

As it should be, the young art lovers remain quite unconscious that it is the exhilaration of art that makes them crawl, skip, slide and jump around, over, under, and through these sculptures in undisguised JOIE DE VIVRE.

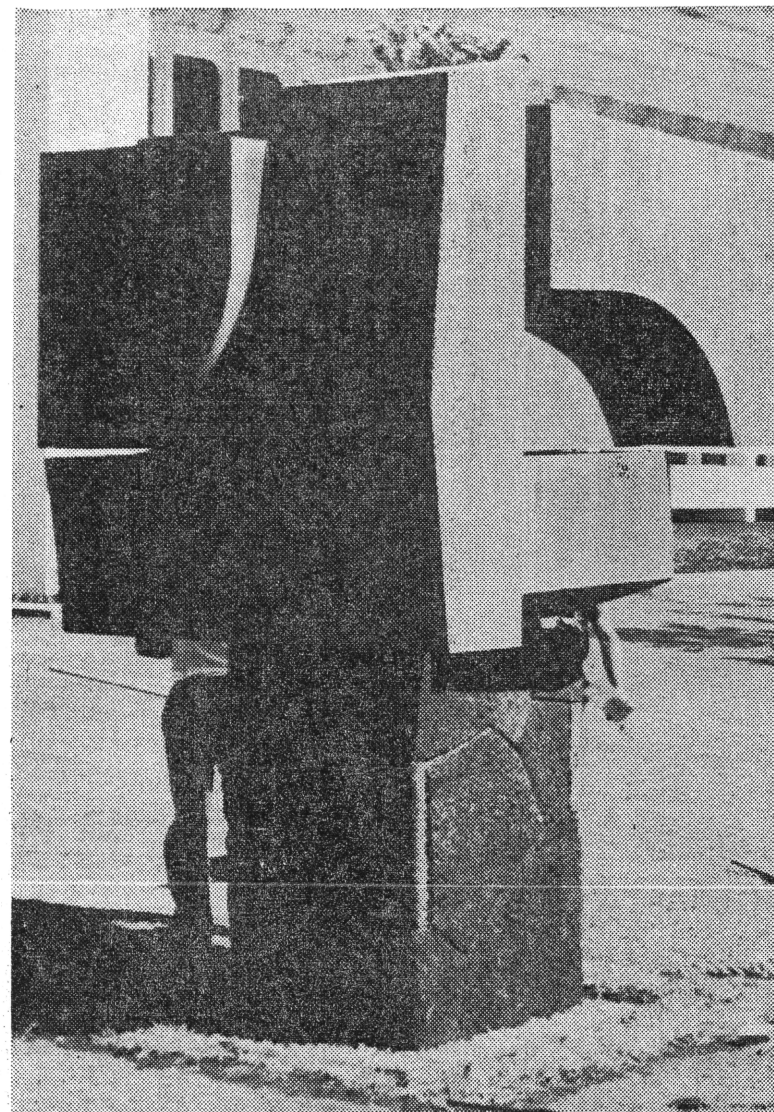
For the New Year, what should one wish to the foundation? Beautiful though the monuments erected in 1970 may be, their link with the surrounding architecture remains indecisive. Doubtless, future plans will emphasize the togetherness of all the arts. In due course our State may enjoy its Versailles, relating facades, gardens and sculptures, with byplays of fountains and lights, into an art form as complex as nature itself.

Among small objects acquired this past year by the foundation a bronze by Mariana Pineda stands out, "Aspects of the Oracle: Accusative." Steeped that it is in the pagan mysteries of Delphi, it pleases me as a present-day chip from the giant oak that grew from the soil of antique Greece.

In our Hawaii, the reminder is far from redundant. Our familiarity with the culture of Asia, our substantial collections of Oriental art are well known. The newly opened Makiki Annex of the Honolulu Academy of Arts, enshrining Chinese, Japanese and Korean objects in a setting worthy of their beauty, caps the trend.

It remains a paradox that our aloha for things Oriental should be of interest primarily to the Western mind. Contrawise, what the Japanese tourist—of whom we hear much these days—will seek in Hawaii, if he is at all art oriented, is an introduction to that other culture that flourished so far away from his homegrounds.

Only too sparse are the clues he will find in our islands that point to the classical world of Greece and Rome as a key to the Occident.



"PILIPU"—A steel sculpture by Edward Brownlee.



IN BRONZE—"Aspects of the Oracle: Accusative," by Mariana Pineda.