

ART

by Jean Charlot

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At Gima's Art Gallery the latest etchings of Marcia-Maris are being displayed. Though this young artist is well-known in local circles, one should respect her recent choice of a *nom de plume* or should one say a *nom de burin*, as a burin, not a pen, is her tool.

Why the new name? Marcia, a baptismal name, was bestowed upon the infant. Maris, the chosen name, means 'of the sea'. For one grown up in Hawaii, even if living elsewhere, the Pacific Ocean remains a formidable presence. Its vast unity, set against the diversity of mainland cityscapes, may be for the kamaaina a must, if only as a memory.

MY LAST REVIEW dealt with the art of Mira Cantor, also an etcher. Bodies were at the root of her inspiration. Through these were felt, imperfectly perceived as if reflected in a dark mirror, things pertaining to the spirit.

The approach of Marcia-Maris is otherwise. Airily, she bypasses the physical. Compared with the subconscious byways she explores, mere bones and sinews may appear to some as rustic stuff.

Marcia's voyaging all happens through landscapes of the mind. Her private planet is peopled with a cast of tricksters — the I, the id, the ego and such — that have plagued humans for eons of time, long before Freud bestowed on them a name.

Her art is difficult to pigeonhole. Tentatively, one could label her tableaux as allegorical, were it not that the term brings to mind worn cliches such as the three Fates boondoggling with the thread of life, or Fame, laurel-topped and trumpeting.

Marcia-Maris' etchings are far from average allegories, even though, at times, she uses in a new context allegory's hackneyed images. In her work, the skeleton still stands for death, and stars for the unattainable.

Perhaps one could speak of her offerings as parables, were it not that preachers always are in a rush to squeeze out of a parable its moral marrow, black and white contrasts easily grasped, say Lazarus in Heaven, the Rich in Hell.

MARCIA-MARIS' etched skits are not parables in that sense. Typically, she bypasses the velvety blacks and dazzling whites that are the expected marks of the etcher's craft, to deal with the delicate range of grays that aquatint favors. Her home-grown theology also tiptoes between black and white, between the medieval black arts that brought devils to dance with witches on sabbath nights, and the white vision that, for the saint, welds into oneness the many facets of life.

Marcia's images have scarcely lost the charm they had when, not so very long ago, she was somewhat of a child prodigy creating, pencil in hand, a jungle all her own, where mixed animal species bred that would have put to flight Alice's magical but Victorian rabbit.

That the artist still remembers her childhood is proved by "Girrhinoliopotamus", a composite that neither a giraffe, nor a rhino, nor a lion, nor a hippo, would care to acknowledge for their own.

Though the images of her youth survive as a still valid alphabet to describe her grown-up musings, the zest of discovery is not there any more. Playful remain the scribbles on the metal plate, but far from playful many of their implications.

What came first? The thought that Marcia-Maris artfully surfs up in a *capable* caption, or the image, as recondite as the thought? *capsule*

She answers that the two are born simultaneously and grow up together, woven as reeds in basketry work, inseparable.

RATHER THAN THE PIECES staged along cosmic lines, my favorites are those that keep, however deep the intent, a veneer of the comical. "Black sheep, white sheep, all sheep together," seems at first a neutral statement on the state of the world, but there are more black sheep than white and, furthermore, because the artist, when printing the plate, denied ink to the white sheep, they fade as ghosts, white on the white paper. Boorishly, the black sheep hog the footlights.

"Vehicle of Intent" is another of my favorites. The strange carriage, partaking of the helplessness of a pram and the pompousness of a royal coronation coach, seems to make very slow progress indeed. No nurse to push it, no sturdy percherons to pull it. Sticking out as the thumb of a stranded hitchhiker, at the end of a long stick is something that could be either a church collection device, hungry for pennies, or, upside down, an inefficient butterfly net.

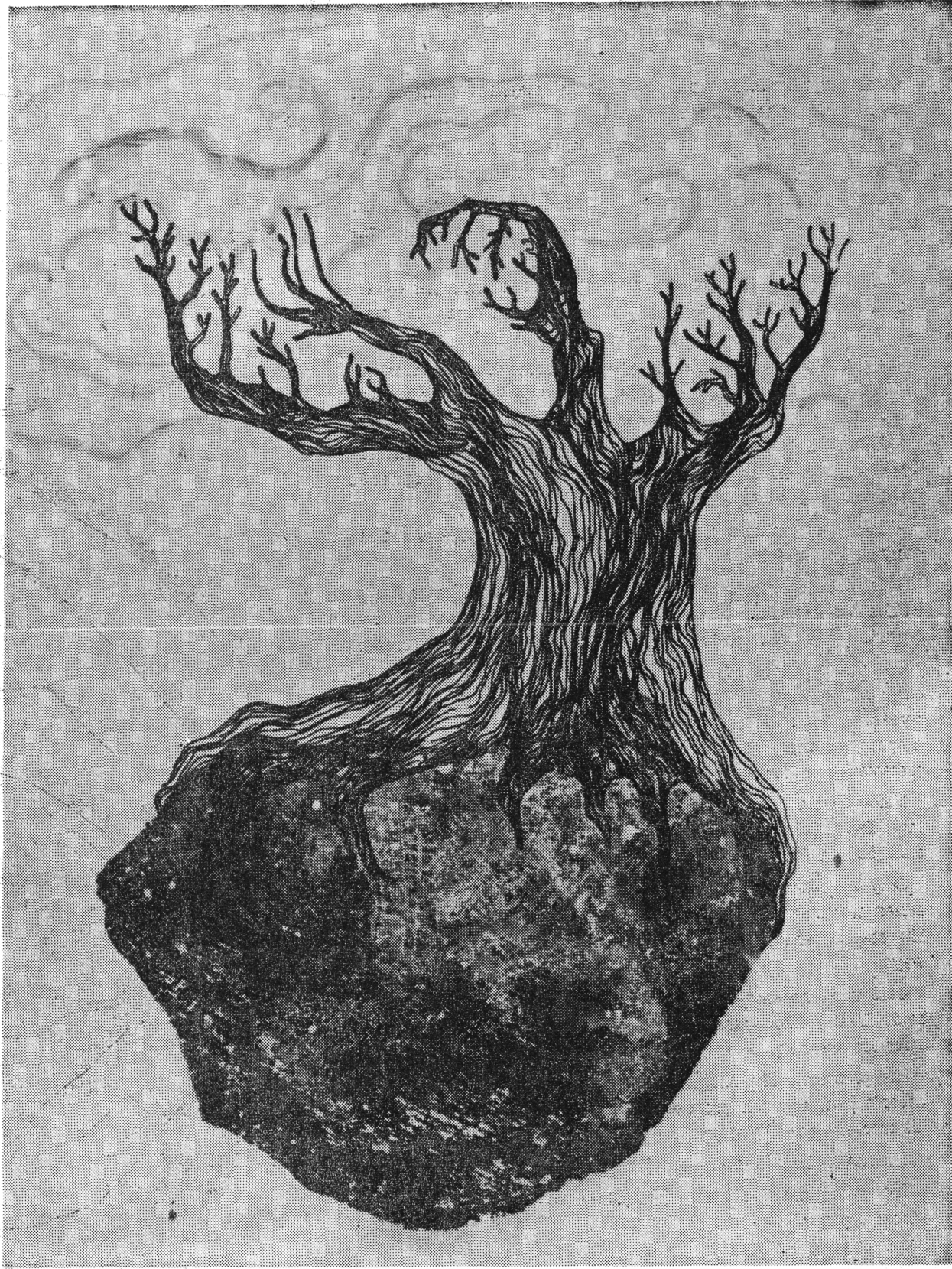
So highly regarded in our day is that brand of art we call pure art, of a kind that the title "Untitled" fits to a T, that it is pleasant to browse in front of Marcia's etchings, openly concerned that they are with the detailed plight of being born human. To an extent, it is soothing to weigh our private dilemmas against those the artist illustrates.

THERE EXISTS A PLEASURE, and a danger as well, in creating, all for oneself, an Eden all one's own. William Blake also ordered his private universe and, great artist that he was, peopled it with angels as ambivalent as are the creatures conjured up by Marcia-Maris. To his delight one day these spooks came to life, blurring out once and for all his merely human contacts.

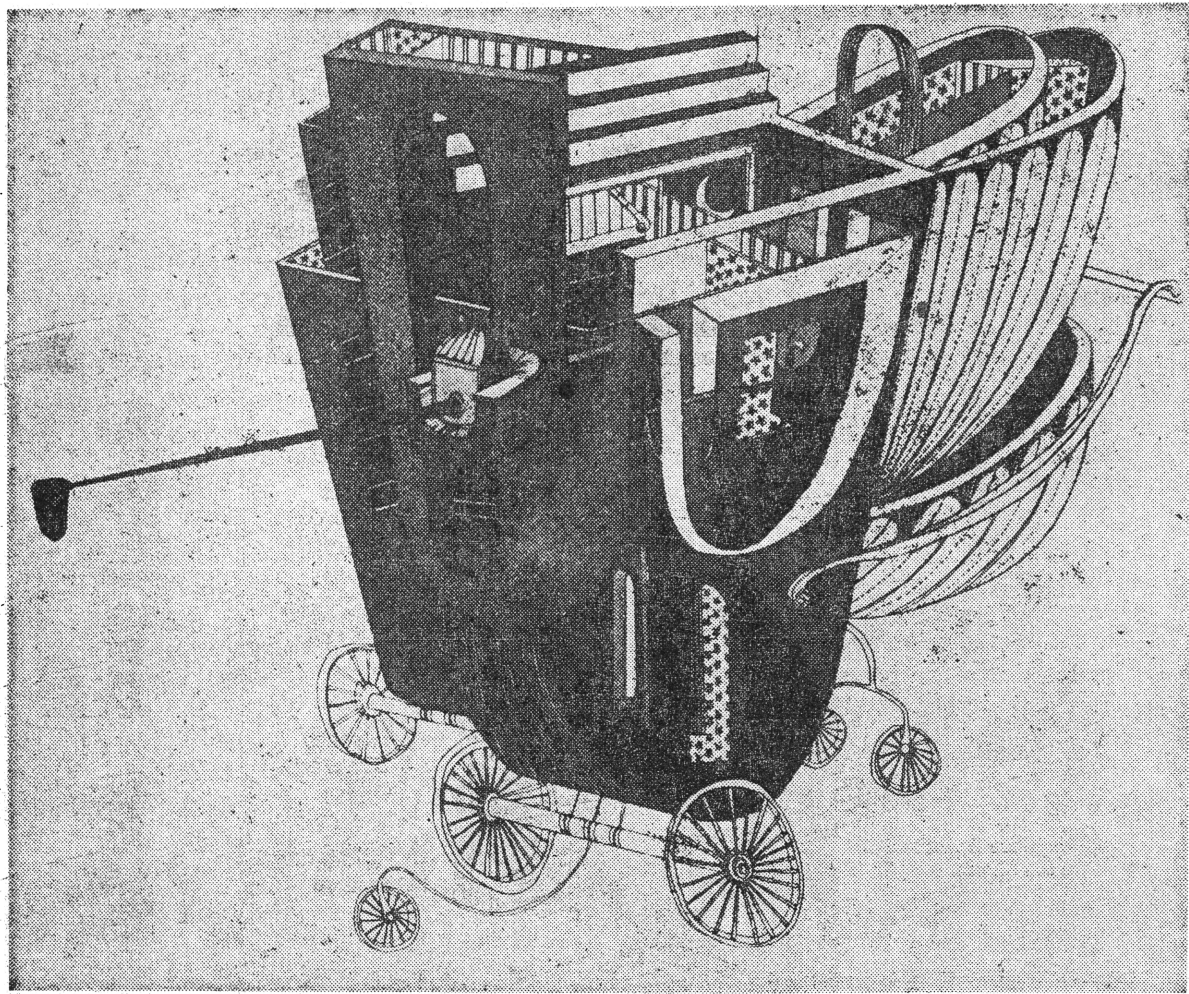
Other artists have approached the world in different ways, equally valid ones. Paul Cezanne labored hard and with a sort of desperate urgency towards a goal that to him seemed an impossible feat, that of properly grounding out on his canvas the shape of a single apple.

With such mixed thoughts in mind, I was pleased to discover a small etching, one not included in the show. It represents olives in a glass jar. Before these fruits, for a moment, the artist felt that same awe that Cezanne had felt before apples.

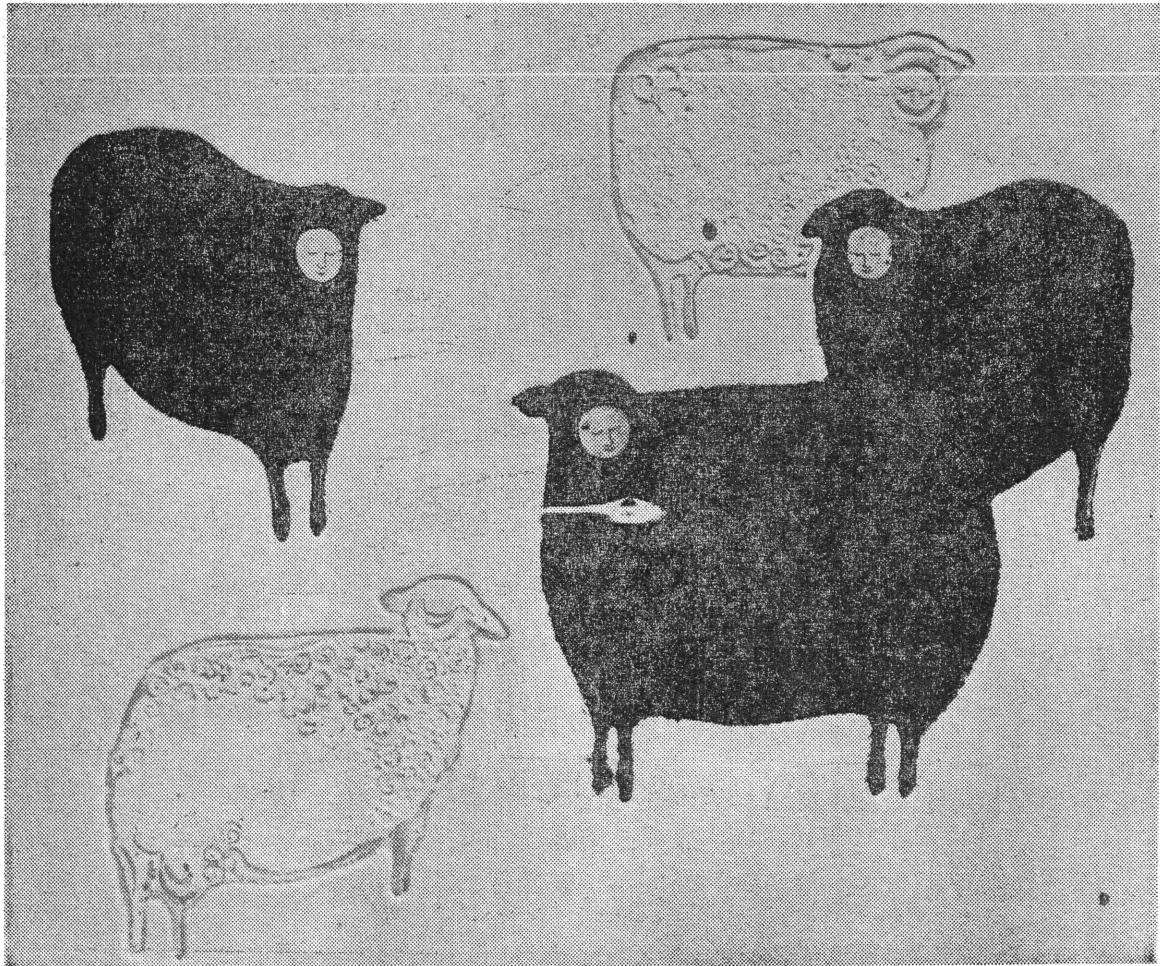
In pure line, eschewing for the nonce the overtly magical veils that aquatint bestows, Marcia-Maris defined in simple truth the small fruits, each a portrait and all united together in orderly fashion within the transparency of the cylindrical jar.



"A tree, a rock, a cloud..."



"Vehicle of Intent..."



"Black Sheep, White Sheep, all sheep together . . ."