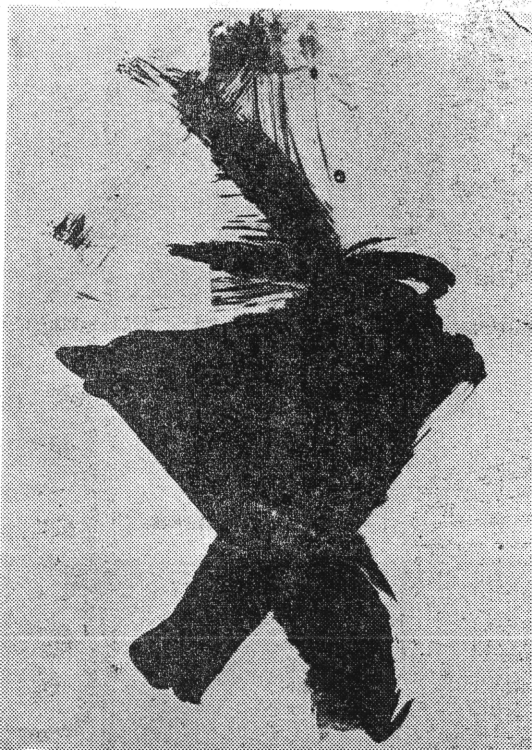


# ART

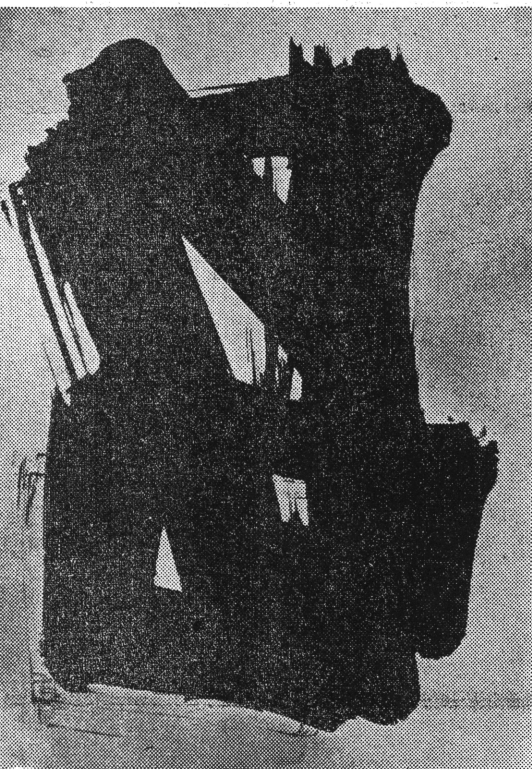
by Jean Charlot

D-22 Honolulu Star-Bulletin

Thurs., July 22, 1971



FRANCIS HAAR—Calligraphy (Sumi-Ink)



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At the Contemporary Arts Center, through Aug. 6, Mirella Monte Belshe shows sculptures; and Francis Haar photographs and calligraphies.

Mirella's materials range from traditional marble and bronze to modern day plastics. Besides solid matter, she enlists the potentialities of less material things, light rays, motion, magnetic forces.

Her approach underlines the presently felt weariness with ectoplasmic free forms, in fashion only yesterday. She trusts instead for her inspiration to the bumps and hollows that surface over the human body.

NAKEDNESS may mean disparate things to as many devotees. "Hair" enthusiasts acclaim it for its boldness and as an unfailing irritant to rub the bourgeois mind the wrong way. For others, the thought of nakedness may bring a sigh of regret, a longing for neo-Greek statues that displayed the whiteness of their marble body, a whiteness to be matched by the presumed purity of their thoughts.

Mirella's spur to action may pertain to the one clan or to the other, or be a mixture of both allegiances. Whichever, her style offers a valid exit out of yesterday's no-subject art.

For sure, the art anatomy she practices has little in common with that taught to men of my generation at the Paris Beaux-Arts. In a dank, dimly lit room reminiscent of the setting for a Rembrandt Anatomy Lesson, the model patiently just stood. Professor Richter orated, touching with the tip of his rod each muscle mentioned, enunciating its name, both in Latin and in the vernacular.

ONE WOULD be at a loss to put learned labels on any one portion of the fragmentary bodies that Mirella Belshe caressingly casts. She shies away from academic inuendoes. To relieve the dreaded tedium, she even tempts the spectator with games. As I was taking notes on my rounds of the exhibition, all the while a young girl, intent on prying

away loose parts tucked in the cracks of a magnetized sculpture, joyfully fought a tug-of-war against this magical invisible opponent.

Doubtless, grownups, looking at these sculptures, will discover other invitations to play, tailored to their age range. "Ecto" bids one take a fistful of terrazzo worry beads that nestle in the concave abdomen of a reclining dark-skinned lady. Is the feel of this lay rosary meant to exorcise more mundane thoughts?

Despite a somewhat artificial levity that strengthens the contemporary flavor, Mirella Belshe's sculptural style appears in deep earnest. Perhaps because, by birthright, the artist herself belongs to that Mediterranean culture that gave us ancient Greece and Rome, her work advances a plea to make again relevant to our present a classical culture.

LIKE HER OWN, classical art favored the naked human body as its esthetic unit. Like her own, classical art imbued man with a casihieratical impersonality and shied away from posturings that could weaken a sense of timelessness.

Francis Haar, the other artist in this show, presents side by side two antithetical facets of his work, calligraphies and photographs.

The calligraphies prove the artist to be one of the very few Westerners thoroughly at ease when dealing with the intricacies of Oriental brush painting. Haar is a master at washing sumi ink on Japanese paper. These large blobs of velvety blacks achieved in a few strokes are rich in rhythmical beauty, and yet remain at the opposite of decorativeness.

IN THESE WORKS, a disposition that we Westerners somewhat hesitantly call zen has cast its veil between the world of appearances and the artist. For the casual gallery goer, some calligraphies will be reminiscent of photographs, others of crouching monsters. Others still, among the most beautiful, look like nothing this world has ever seen.

By contrast, Haar's photographs hold the mirror to

objective nature. Among the best are those that pile up detail upon detail with such intensity that, compared to them, the most meticulous still life painted by a nineteenth century American primitive would appear as impressionistic.

Textures stand out more forcefully than in any Caravaggio. The rugged bark of a tree trunk, the delicate lace of a cobweb, the veins of a single leaf, all recapture for one the delighted awe with which, circa 1840, the pioneer shows of daguerreotypes were received.

HAAR'S PRESENTATION of self through two so thoroughly different media is in no way the sign of a split personality. The undoubted unity that ties together the two halves of the show raises queries as to the relation of the artist with his art.

Often, a simple theory is advanced that the art is but an outer projection of the artist, a process only slightly different from that of "making an angel" by falling face down into soft snow, or like a scattering of individualized fingerprints.

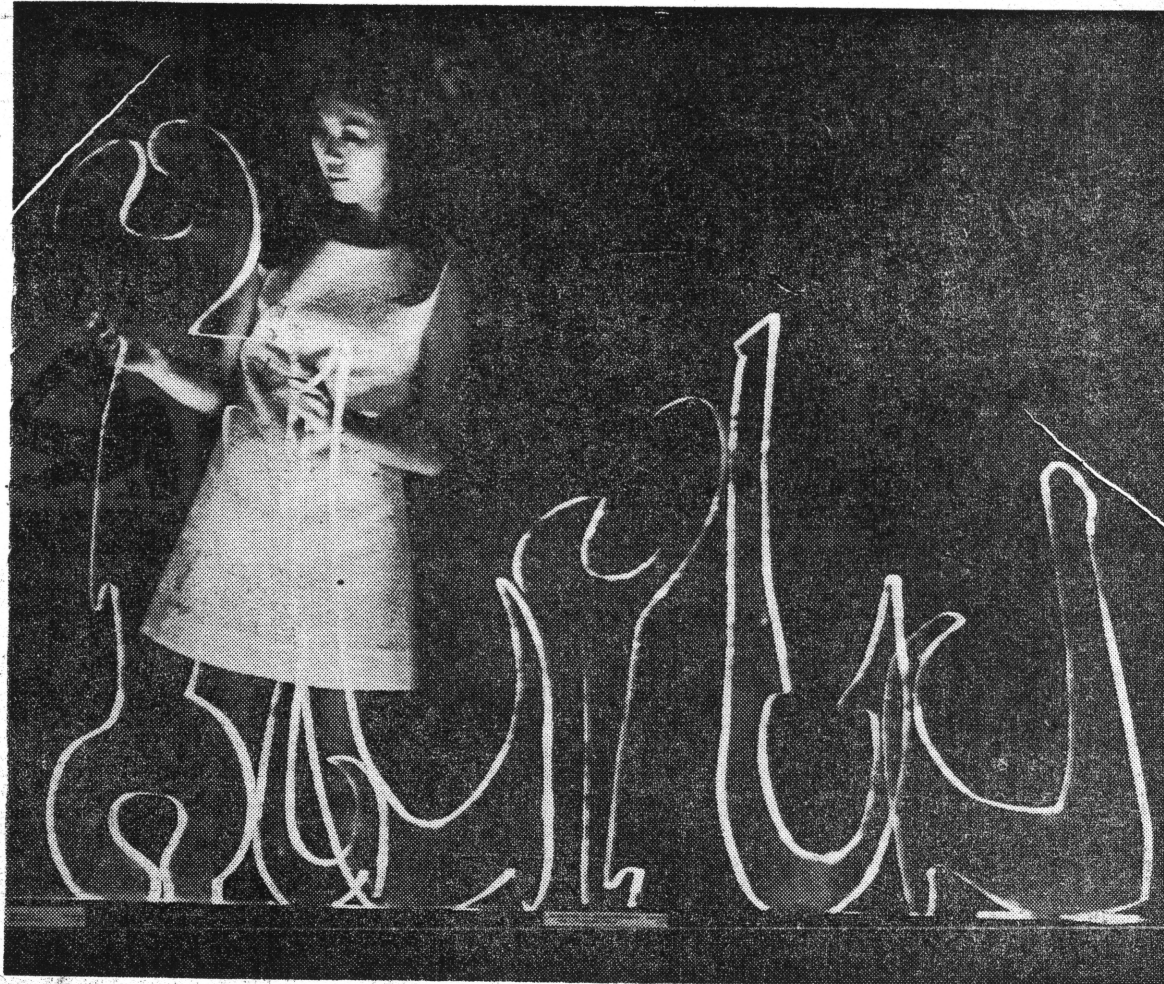
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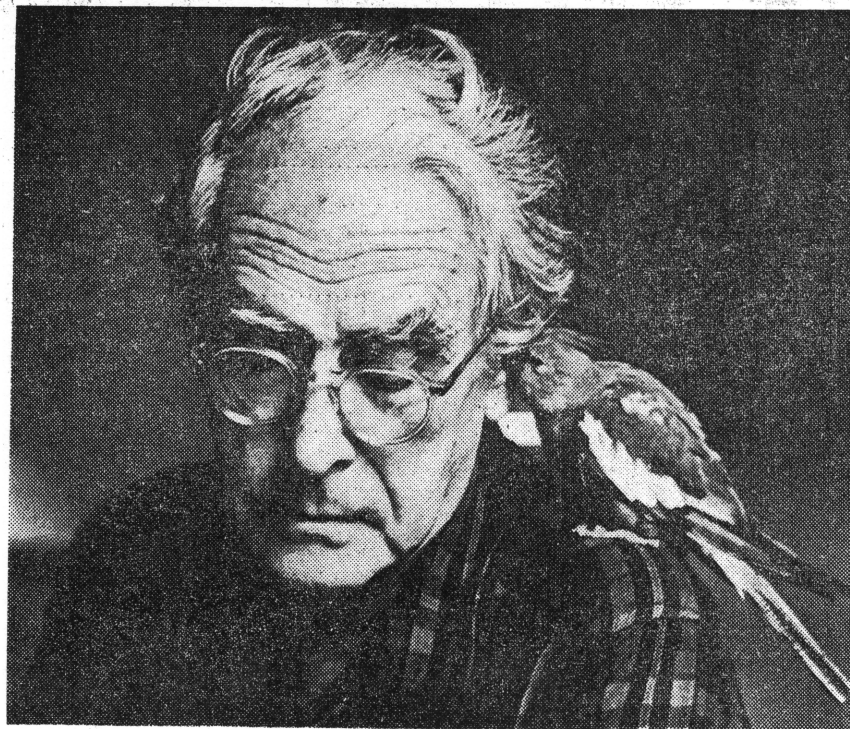
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Projecting successfully his own self through two such

dissimilar media as photography and calligraphy, Haar succeeds thanks to a deep sense of humility that forbids him to impose upon either medium strains its nature would reject.



MIRELLA BELSHE—"Makua 4, 5, 6". (Edge-lighted plexiglass).



FRANCIS HAAR—"Jean Charlot"—(Color-Photo)

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