

Enduring Value in Art Programs

SIR: "Rep. Tony Kunimura urges the State to stop buying art objects, because much of it is junk, pure junk."

For me the statement echoed uneasily those I had heard in the past, as I took an active part in other government-sponsored art programs: the mural renaissance that occurred in Mexico in the 1920's and the WPA programs created by President Roosevelt during the depression of the 1930's. Then, as now, derision was the lot of the participants.

Nowadays, the Mexican frescoes of the 1920's are rated a National Treasure, unmatched both as an image of the culture of Mexico and as a tourist attraction. Far from being the boon-dogglers that politicians laughed at, artists who worked in the Roosevelt programs have emerged in time as American masters of stature. Among others, Ben Shahn, Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, have enriched the United States with works far beyond the value of the meager allowances that kept them alive during the lean years of the 1930's.

What could happen in our Hawaii in the 1970's if Rep. Kunimura has his way could constitute a disaster. Alfred Preis, as director of the Foundation for Culture and the Arts, has done an admirable job in sponsoring works of permanent value. Deflecting his activities towards lesser goals could prove a grievous wound to the cultural life of the State.

It would prove of interest if Rep. Tony Kunimura would clarify his up-to-now purely negative position by illustrating his statement with a choice of works, paintings and sculptures, that he considers worthy of being owned by the State of Hawaii.

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