

THE THOMAS JEFFERSON HALL FRESCOES
East-West Center

In the late spring of 1967, the East-West Center initiated a project to extend the scope of culture and the arts by inviting two internationally prominent artists to study and work together at the Center. One of the artists was Indonesia's leading painter Affandi, known by one name only as has been the custom in his country. The other was Hawaii's own Jean Charlot, whose works are found in churches, public buildings and museums throughout the world.

They came to the Center's Institute of Advanced Projects on Senior Specialist grants in May, 1967, and worked together for several months-- exchanging philosophies, ideas and techniques. At the end of this interchange, the artists collaborated in painting large frescoes in Thomas Jefferson Hall, the Center's administration building, as gifts in appreciation for the grants.

Professor Charlot related the initial discussions of the project thus: "In our first talks and sketches, we decided that both murals should contain hands of a heroic size, symbolical of Asia and the Occident. Otherwise, there was no compulsion to adopt identical styles, color schemes. To be successful, these murals, representing distinct cultures, could not be otherwise than dissimilar."

The frescoes were executed by the artists in their own inimitable styles in September of 1967 before a steady stream of interested observers. For many it was a rare opportunity to watch distinguished artists at work on major projects from the preliminary cartoon stage to the finished murals. The artists painted in true fresco, a mural technique inherited from classical antiquity and consisting of the application of water colors to wet plaster. The frescoes, 13 by 16 feet in size, are on the second floor walls of Jefferson Hall with Affandi's on the south or makai side and Charlot's on the north or mauka side.

The artists described their works as follows:

CHARLOT

"The scene is enclosed in a cubic space that prolongs in illusive perspective the perspective of the surrounding architecture. I used linear perspective, also called Italian perspective, as one of the unique features of occidental art. You should see this in the picture when you come up the stairs and stop at the mezzanine landing. In the center, large hands enclose fire. The hands stand for human effort; the fire for creativity. Two figures flank the central motif. Their forms and attitudes suggest the classical arts of Greece and Rome that are the basic foundations of our occidental art. They are mirror images of the statues in cool colors. On the left is Inspiration, looking upwards, representing the elements of poetry or genius inclusive in all discoveries, be they in art or science. On the right is Study, self-centered, reading a book, suggesting factual research and a sense of history."

AFFANDI

"I took a hand holding three figures. The hand represents the hand of God. On the left is Gandhi. In the center is a Buddhist monk. He could be Chinese, he could be Japanese. On the right is the figure of Semar who is very famous as a wise man in Indonesia. All the three figures together represent the wisdom of the East. The waves around them represent the ocean which they had to cross to come here (to the Center)."

THE ARTISTS

Affandi was born in Tjirebon in West Java in 1910. He did not begin painting until 1939 when he was 29, but in less than 10 years he was invited to India for a traveling exhibition. He traveled and painted in India from 1948 to 1950 then went to Europe, visiting and working in major art cities such as London, Paris and Rome from 1950 to 1954. During these years he exhibited his works in the Bienal in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and in the Biennale in Venice where he won a prize. In 1955 he returned to Indonesia to work. Two years later in 1957 he visited the United States on a State Department travel grant. He returned to the U.S. in 1962 as a visiting professor of art at Ohio State University. At this time he held a one-man show in the World House Gallery in New York City. In 1966 he was invited by the Brazilian government for exhibitions in the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro and in Sao Paulo. His home now is in Jogjakarta.

Jean Charlot was born in Paris in 1898 and is now a U.S. citizen. He learned painting from his mother who was an artist. In 1920 he went to Mexico and worked with Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros and Guerrero on the murals of the Ministry of Education buildings in Mexico City. During the 1930's he was one of the painters of the Mexican Renaissance who rediscovered pre-Columbian art. Today more than 40 of his murals adorn buildings in Mexico, Fiji and the U.S., including Hawaii, and his paintings and other works are exhibited in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Bishop Museum. In addition, Charlot is author, lithographer, illustrator and teacher. He has taught at Columbia University, the University of Iowa, the Arts Student League in New York, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Georgia, Smith College and Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. He joined the University of Hawaii in 1949 as professor of art and retired only last year after 17 years of teaching.