

Abstracts at Academy

Albers' Selfless, Explicit Paintings Grip Viewers

By JEAN CHARLOT

The joint show of Anni and Josef Albers opened Thursday at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. A strong common denominator of esthetic and of quality links the work of both the weaver and the painter. As it is only just to leave a review of Anni's show to one experienced at the craft of weaving, this is an appraisal of the pictures only.

An average misconception of abstract paintings is that they are bound to be nebulous statements. Few deny that such are good for the mental health of the artist who thus relieves his subconscious of accumulated pressures. One also expects that this therapeutic esthetic will not prove as good for the public that the selfish painter saddles with plastic equivalents of his uncertainties, puzzlements, and complexes, with only the slenderest clue to translate these home-made hieroglyphs.

Those who think of all abstract art in such terms are due for a healthy shock when confronted by the paintings of Josef Albers, even though they too are undiluted abstracts. It was unusual, and typical of this one opening day that, despite punch and friends, and the presence even of the artist himself, it was none of these rival attractions but the pictures themselves that gripped a surprised public.

Poles apart from the brand of abstract art that is a subjective gymnastic, the quality that struck forcefully and at first contact was the selflessness, the heroic intent of the painter to "abstract" himself in fact out of his own pictures. Drained of the passing mood, depurated of emotionalism, they become objective statements.

Albers does not paint as if it was a sport, with the aplomb and grace of a fencer or an actor. His lines are ruled, his areas measured, his color relations weighed with the care of a family druggist filling a prescription. Where then is the art in an esthetic so uncontaminated by mostly everything that is usually referred to as artistic?

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EDITOR'S NOTE—This article, which appeared in Monday's editions, is being re-run to clear up possible confusion that may have resulted when some portions were edited out.

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ALBERS' CREED is better appraised in terms of the classical ideal wherein the ideation takes strong precedence over the execution, wherein individual beings exist only inasmuch as they approximate their Platonic Idea. In the world that Albers paints, one misses indeed individuals, with the reassuring shortcomings and comforting flaws that endear them to us in this world. Revealed instead, in a light no less explicit for being rational rather than solar, we see the metaphysical skeleton of what makes the universe tick, with its potentialities of expansion and motion.

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SHOULD ONE dismiss this art as esoteric research and go back with understandable relief to still-lives of edible things and calendar nudes?

Well, this world that we made and that we live in is not exactly a cozy one. How could artists fail to explore the same possibilities that scientists tackle?

On opening day, the public proved how aware it was of this fact, and it was with grave attention that one followed Albers' own anecdote of swapping with an atomic physicist esthetic for scientific data, and how both men found that their conclusions dovetailed.