

# The Sketch Book Of Kappa Pi



Jean Chatot  
1973



## **About The Cover Artist**

Jean Charlot is an illustrator, author, painter and printmaker. French by birth and training, he grew up with the magic of Mexico implanted in his imagination by the art treasures from the New World in his family's possession. This collection started with an ancestor who served with Maximilian in Mexico. After Mr. Charlot had served with the French artillery and the army of occupation in Germany, he visited an uncle in Mexico, which intensified his love of this country.

Charlot's talents in drawing led him to become affiliated with the Mexican fresco painters, and this in turn stirred his interest in the Carnegie Institution's archeological expedition in Yucatan. For three years he worked with this group, making sketches of the Mayan frescoes and colored bas-reliefs.

For ten years Mr. Charlot taught and lectured at Art Students League, Chouinard School of Art, the University of Ohio, Columbia University, Black Mountain College, Smith and others. His most outstanding years in teaching were at the University of Georgia where for three years he was Artist-in-Residence, through a grant of Carnegie Corporations. While there he executed three outstanding murals.

In 1939 Charlot became an American citizen. He is married to Zomah Gay, of Utah, and they have three children and several grandchildren.

Charlot's interest in Polynesian and Mexican cultures is reflected in his art. He has executed murals in Honolulu while teaching at the University of Hawaii, and spent some time in Samoa working on murals.

He is an original and individual painter who combines the vitality of the baroque with simplicity of the primitives. For the past sixteen years the Charlots have made their home in Honolulu where Jean is still busy illustrating books and painting murals.

*Honorary Member of Kappa Pi*





Jean Charlot



by Zomah Charlot

# Jean's Picture Books



**R**eturn to the far South Pacific and once again, as during our Fiji adventure, a mural was part of the trip. This time, my husband, Jean Charlot, was looking for rare plants, preliminary studies for a fresco on ancient Hawaiian themes.

We were staying with son John and family in Pago Pago where he was scholar-in-residence for American Samoa, living in an apartment that overlooks the famous inner harbor and is next door to the building where Somerset Maugham had Sadie Thompson get out of the Rain.

Actually the sun was shining a lot the weeks we were there, and walking beside the water was an enjoyable thoughtful stroll. I had on my mind Garnet Leader's request to write again about Jean at work.

My first article for Kappa Pi told of a job done in Fiji. Though we were again on another faraway island, what I now wanted to tell about was work Jean had begun at home, back in his Honolulu studio. Not even a dramatic job where he must climb scaffolds, wear a crash helmet, paint large areas of damp plaster. Instead he had been sitting on the arm of a chair alongside a window table, twisting to reach a specially prepared aluminum plate, drawing in black crayon images for a new book. Only I knew these unimpressive doodlings would become glowing color lithographs, a repertory of his favorite subjects.

Forty years ago I had watched this same creative process when Lynton Kistler, the printer, and Jean had worked together on Picture Book. Now they planned a follow-up, Picture Book II: same artist, same printer, to be published exactly forty years later.

*I*n 1933, Jean came out from New York to Los Angeles to see me. He soon met Lynton, assistant in his father's printing shop, and a close collaboration began. I must have been feeling neglected for Jean remembers my telling him, "Leave, leave immediately!" and that he answered, "Women always try to get in the way of men trying to do great things." I remember how my father, finding me in tears, advised that Jean was a guest and had after all come a long way, we should manage a solution when he was gone.

Jean pig-headedly stayed until the book was completed, drawing eight parts of eight color pictures at one time on large sheets of metal. This unusual process had other on-lookers watching with amazement and pleasure, but when I visited the printing plant my attention was on the feminine looking envelopes of letters that were reaching Jean in Los Angeles from New York.

When the first print, a little dancer that illustrated the prospectus, was finished, Mr. Kistler Sr. called some of his old printer friends together to see what had been done. Jean was around and heard them talking. They were eager to know how a technique that gave so many colors without any photographic separation of color was possible. Senior Kistler gave this answer that made them all nod their heads with understanding, "He is a Frenchman!"

When all the work had become a book I got an autographed copy:

*Zohmah dear,*

*This book is for you. It is  
the first copy that was ready.  
Do like it.*

*Jean*

And I saw Jean off on a Santa Fe train. In those days the small wayside station had an outdoor platform with a clear view of the train as it disappeared down the track carrying my beloved.

Without consulting my father on what to do for heart-break, I packed Picture Book and carrying it with me started off to work my way around the world. Passing Jean en route, in New York he waved goodbye to me as I embarked for Europe.

New York being a feature of my world geography, Jean didn't have a chance to forget me. So eventually we got married. I can now watch another Picture Book happen.

**W**e flew home from Pago Pago with neckloads of shell leis and armloads of duty free liquor. Jean went back to his perch on the arm of the chair. As quickly as he drew on the plates I mailed them back to Kistler, now boss of his own printing plant in Los Angeles.

Work stopped because minor surgery was needed. Jean came home from the hospital in a couple of days. He didn't want to climb steps to the studio. He asked me to bring his lithographic materials downstairs. But I never did. He wasn't getting better. Not only not working but not even opening his diary or prayer book. To hospital emergency, major complications like blood clots and poisoning. The doctor told me to realize Jean is almost 75 years old. I answered "Jean is strong," and son Peter was there to lean on. A Hawaiian friend repeated *Lanakila Lanakila* (Hope Victory). When I brought the message to Jean he opened his eyes and corrected my pronunciation.

Proofs of the book came. I took them to the hospital, wanting to interest Jean, but pain separated him from work and even from prayer. I was the one who must pray.

Finally home again, long enough to gain strength for a second operation, to celebrate his 75th birthday, and to have a family gathering. From American Samoa, Venezuela, Waiahole, Honolulu, nineteen of us, the first time all sons and wives, daughter and son-in-law, nine grandchildren got together. Considering Jean's health, the long dreamed-of reunion lasted for an hour!

Jean says coming back to family and life reminded him of a cartoon he saw of two boys discussing their current event class, one saying to the other, "... the only trouble is it goes on and on."

Son Martin, also an artist, brought his Papa a drawing table. The first Jean had ever had. He doesn't even own an easel, preferring to prop canvasses against a chair. But he really appreciated this table. Now he sat comfortably with his leg raised on cushions. Happy, though he couldn't move, he could scribble, to get back his interest in life.

The book was just the right work for convalescence. And when the Leeward College wall—125 x 24 ft. — will be ready to paint on, the doctor says Jean will climb scaffolds again. The taro leaves and breadfruit sketched in Samoa will then be translated into fresco.



Getting back to his book, trial proofs in hand, Jean felt most puzzled. The separation of colors is a mental affair. The lapse of time forced him to begin all over. How black crayon drawings result in the right blend of colors when printed will always remain a mystery to me.

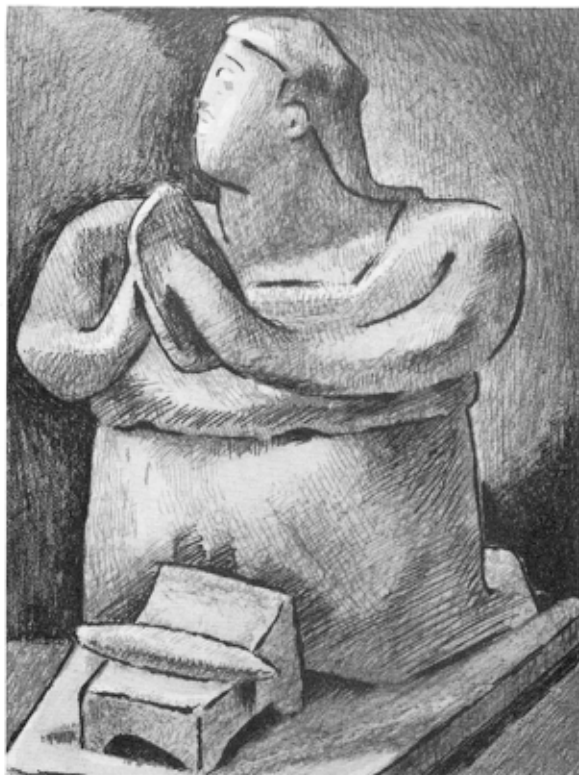
In the two months between operations Jean drew over 275 drawings on aluminum plates. Superimposed and printed in color, they became the 32 original lithographs of Picture Book II.

As preparation Jean had made sketches and then oil paintings of the exact size of the future lithographs — 8 x 6 inches — to use as models. He pinned on the studio wall a chart with numbers that stood for pictures and colors; each motif took 7, 8, or 9 plates for completion. Colors were coded by numbers and I would type mostly numerical instructions as plates were wrapped and mailed. When proofs were returned I hopefully watched as Jean checked them off on the chart.

Problems that may never have arisen had Jean been standing next to Kistler at the press were solved by mail and long-distance phone calls. When mistakes did happen, efforts to find solutions without starting again from scratch had a way of enriching a print. The trust painter and printer felt in each other allowed the drawing and printing to proceed without delay, though the Pacific Ocean divided them.

Forty years ago Paul Claudel, the French poet, wrote the captions, which he termed Inscriptions, for Picture Book. For the new book, Jean wrote the text, but felt that Claudel's choice word should not be reused. The title page of Picture Book II reads:

*Lithographs and Captions by Jean Charlot*





Mexican subjects fill the first book, an emotional summary of Jean's involvement with that beloved country. Only the last picture, a blonde named "Grace," is a relief from his brown Indian paradise. The model he met on board ship when she travelled to Mexico from a Long Island duck farm. He portrayed her as a puritan peasant.

"Terracotta," opens the new book. Jean has painted many times this fragile statuette of an Indian woman busy grinding corn, as many times as it has been packed and unpacked on journeys from Mexico to Hawaii. Appropriately it is now on a bookcase shelf next to a Hawaiian calabash.

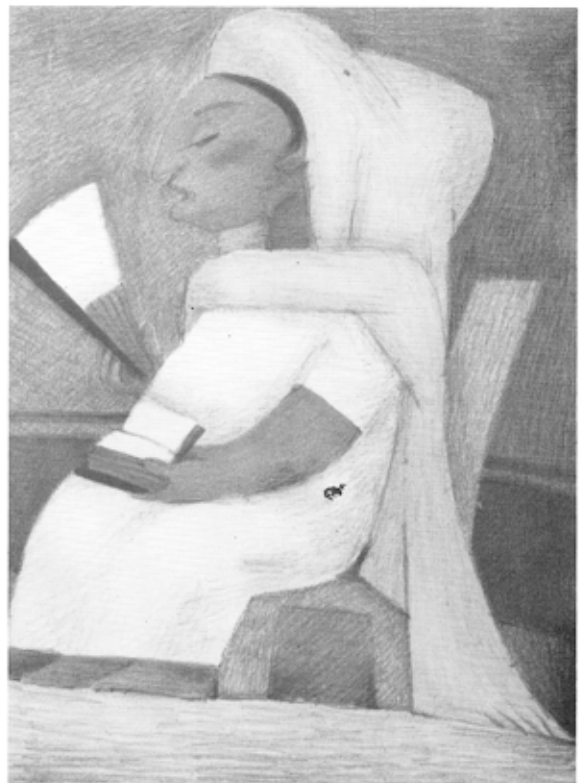
While Mexico and Latin America are still highlighted, in addition Picture Book II has ancient Hawaii, and the impact of being in Fiji and contacting the marvelous Melane-sians. The closing pictures are titled "Icons," religion being a part of Jean wherever he is living.

Subject matter is never far fetched. The books show what Jean has seen and felt and painted all these years. Just as happens in "Tying Child to Chair," our own babies got fastened to chairs with *rebozos*. I've cooked in a "Mexican Kitchen" over a charcoal fire. But contrasting with the peacefulness that Jean favors, what I remember most is the model Luciana using my pressure cooker as her toy, with beans exploding all over the ceiling.

Guatemala, Hawaii, Fiji are places we were together. Yet, like anyone else, I must look at his pictures to see what he saw. In "Pilgrim with Candles," a girl quietly prays in the Church of Chichicastenango, while what comes to my memory are smoky flames and rowdy crowds on the steps outside this famed Guatemala shrine.

Jean keeps his mind's eye on centuries old classical Hawaii, "Drummer," "Gourd Player," chant in a language he understands. The puppeteer in "Hula Ki'i," the pagan priest communing with a "God-Stone," are to him more real than tourists in the new highrise hotels. Buildings have gone up around us so swiftly even my image of 'old Hawaii' is that of not so long ago.





We keep in a drawer a *tabua*, the whaletooth hung from a braided cord, given by the villagers of Naiserelagi in thanks for the mural Jean painted in their church, and we have a long Fiji spear that leans against a wall. But Jean's Fiji memories are more vivid than these artifacts. Of "War Dance," he writes:

*Horses at a gallop and volleys  
from firearms are the Arab way  
of honoring a guest.  
Melanesians shun such bulky  
accessories. When the black  
feet stop trampling, when the  
war club freezes short of its  
mortal intent, the honored  
guest sweats.*

"The Holy Family" closes the book, with Joseph and Mary sheltered under Mexican hats. Joseph carries a flowering staff, and in Mary's arms a market basket, good housewife that she is. Jesus, between them, holding their hands, takes a step towards us.

Anyone seeing the two books side by side will probably attempt a comparison, and ponder what changes forty years have made in the artist's point-of-view. I asked Jean how he felt about it. His answer, "First one is younger. Second less young."

