

ART

By JEAN CHARLOT



5-4-66

Wednesday

Judith Nelson's first show

Opening this week and lasting through May, in the patio of the Hawaii State Library hangs a one-woman show by Judith Nelson, her first.

Pop art is here to stay. It was with us long before it came to be considered as a branch of the Fine Arts. Pop is an abbreviation of popular, in the sense of folksy.

Not so long ago, folk art was made by the folks. Its appreciators were the folks, mostly.

It was an art of the countryside: naive stone calvaries planted at the crossroads of Brittany, under-glass paintings by Bavarian peasants, New Mexico "santos," embroidered bridal costumes, stomping dances in wooden shoes.

Work for the winter months

Calloused hands stitched blatant embroideries or carved wood chests in the winter months when field work was at a standstill.

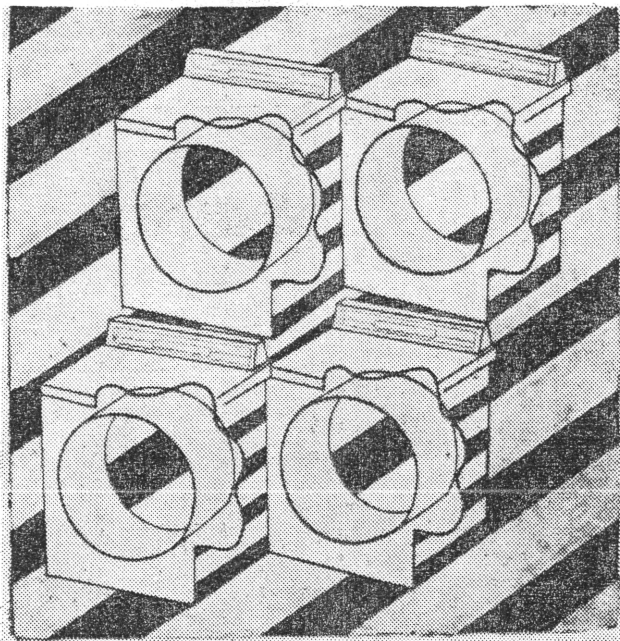
The woodcutter cut designs on blanks that, inked and printed and gaudily stenciled, sold at fairs and pilgrimages.

As cities spread their cement over what had once been grazing or farming land, as the peasant became a factory worker, this type of folk art shrank and became mostly a thing of the past.

The city creates its own art

The city, however, created its own kind of folk art. Man, be he peasant or city dweller, needs art as much as he needs bread. Man can live without detergents, without the more expensive and less expensive spreads, without, let us admit it, even an automatic toothbrush. But man cannot live without art.

In the city, the Frankenstein monster that is automation replaces the patient hand of the craftsman. Commercial ads, packaging, TV commercials, are among the new forms of folk art cut to fit the city dweller.



"Empty Bendices," by Judith Nelson

In the newspapers not even quotations from Wall Street are enough. Man reads first the novelized news—that are at one time comedy, drama and visual art—that we call the funnies.

The esthetic food for the masses

Posters, ads, packaging, funnies, are the esthetic fare of the city masses, the folks that were referred to as the great unwashed, but not any more.

Bathed in suds, soothed with base creams and scalded with detergents, the city folks are sold on these commodities through the medium of art, even though neither tycoons nor customers ever reasoned that it was art.

Then came the taste-makers. Some were true artists. Some were shrewd dealers. Some were museum pundits. Packaging, commercials, funnies, were raised to the status of Fine Arts. Albeit reluctantly, the New York Museum of Modern Art bought not so long ago its first sculptured hamburger!

It's a reaction against an extreme

Pop is a natural reaction against the extreme sophistication reached in our modern art. When art becomes esoteric, addresses itself to the few, a violent reaction

follows, at times not unlike mob action.

French rococo, exquisite though it was, was prelude to the Revolution. In that case, not only were pink cupids fluttering on pastel blue skies whitewashed, but not a few heads did roll besides.

Our Hawaiian pop artists, unlike those who live in Chicago or Los Angeles, are handicapped. They must close their eyes to what of nature lingers with us, mountains, ocean, banyan trees.

There is already, however, plenty of subject matter to inspire them, enough parking lots, a sufficient jungle of hotels and condominiums, a maze of supermarkets.

Enthusiasm and devotion

They are an enthusiastic and devoted group, small enough in number to feel proud of their pioneering venture, unnoticed enough so that they may suffer that dash of martyrdom that is the lot of the pioneer.

Happily for us, they are also true artists, who articulate convincingly in lines, textures and colors, the tenets of the new esthetic faith.

An opening salvo from the group was the show organized by Duane Preble in 1964, in the disused University of Hawaii snackbar.

Called "The Street," it

condensed in frighteningly convincing fashion all mechanical aids to traffic—stop-and-go lights, speed-limit warnings, right-and-left-turning arrows.

One walked over the geometric abstracts, white on black, or parking lots and street crossings. Sound tracks recorded from life blared disharmonies.

In the present show, Judith Nelson shows drawings, prints and paintings, and of course mixed media. Illustrated on this page is an etching, "Empty Bendices", undoubtedly the plural form of Bendix. The etched line is as unflinching as that of a mechanical rendering, exploded bits of machinery that allow one to see simultaneously the inside and outside of the object.

The equivalent of yesterday's bucket

A Bendix is to us an everyday occurrence, its rotating cylinder an everyday sight. As the broom, mop and bucket mean yesterday, the Bendix—or any brand X of washer at that—stands for our present.

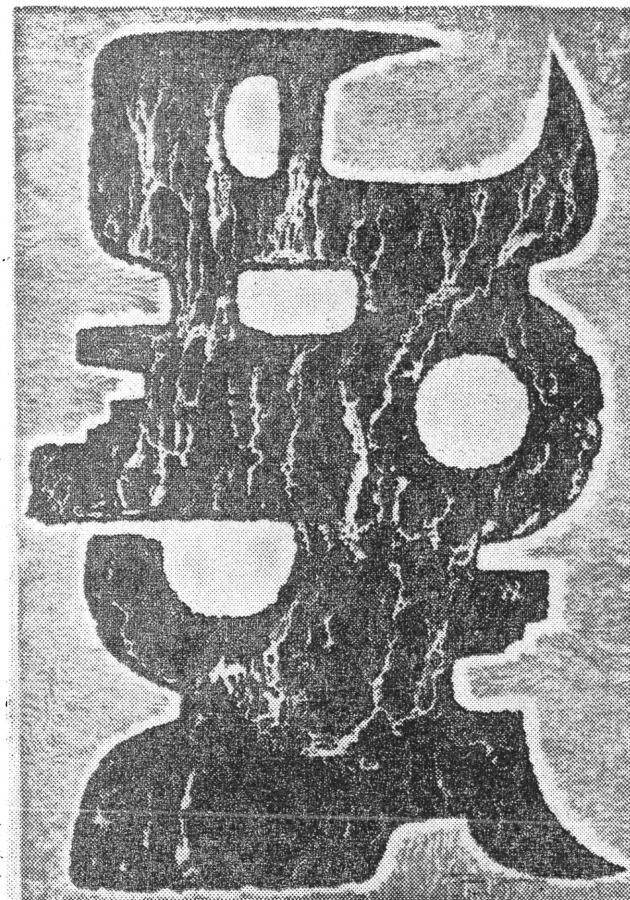
If at work today, an impressionist could use the washing machine as a subject to display color chords. An expressionist could render it with distorted brushstrokes to express his inner passion.

The very impersonality of Judith Nelson's treatment, the quadruple repeat of a same subject, are far from negative. They express man submerged in automation, the institution man tied to his job as a live machine.

Old images are revived

In other works, the artist piously revives images worn thin through generations of use and abuse. The cliché may be used raw. "General Buchanan Arrives" could be borrowed from a Civil War diorama.

The cliché may be stated with a twist. In "The Family," man, woman and child are featureless blue silhouettes. Their inner anatomy is borrowed from underwear ads. It emphasizes the bra form and stretch panties, and the manly comfort



"June A" by Toshi Yoshida

of athletic shorts.

Despite the pop paraphernalia, "The Family" remains a tender picture. Cozily gathered, man, woman and child ooze the trustful relationship that makes the mood timeless.

A show of Japanese wood blocks

At Gima's Art Gallery, Toshi and Kiso Yoshida demonstrated yesterday the Japanese craft of printing from color blocks. A show of their work is current.

The Yoshidas show sensitivity in cutting the blocks and delicacy in printing them.

Calligraphic know-how, varied textures that range from the evocation of the smoothness of ancient jades to the rough grain of the wood of well-used floor boards, make these prints things of beauty.

Modern Japanese print makers have reached stage two of an evolution parallel to that of the Western artist.

Gone are the ancestral pine trees hanging over crags, the snow-patched mountains, the kimonoed women, the rising fog. Esoteric abstraction holds these two print makers entranced.

A hope for a third stage

Perhaps there shall be a stage three in their evolution. It will come with a realization that great art

and subject matter never were at odds.

Their later work, or the work of a later generation, may very well go back to the font, the work of the masters who eternized the people of Edo and the stations of the Tokaido. Already Munakata shows the way.

(Dr. Charlot welcomes questions on art from readers. Write: Jean Charlot, University of Hawaii Art Department, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822.)

Art news

The Hawaii Arts Council will open an exhibit of drawings at the Church of the Crossroads Art Gallery Sunday.

The show will cover pen, pencil and washes with no color limitations, and will be juried by Ken Bushnell of the University of Hawaii art staff.

Emphasis will be on a graphic and linear approach. The show will remain through June 2.

The Honolulu Academy of Arts isn't going to stay open Thursday nights any more.

Academy officials said they are so busy during the day with its expanded program of exhibitions and activities that they can't remain open one night a week.

The new academy hours are from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and from 3 to 6 p.m. Sundays. The academy will continue to be closed Mondays.

Helene A. Cailliet will present a one-woman show of oils, collages, mixed media and drawings with an opening preview Monday from 2 to 5 p.m. at Grossman-Moody, Waikiki.

The Hawaiian Civic Club of Honolulu is sponsoring the show. The exhibition will continue through May 13 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.