

# ART

by Jean Charlot

## A pottery show by Sam Uyehara

At Joji's, a showing of ceramics by Sam Uyehara which ended yesterday.

Once upon a time, arts and crafts were close to synonymous. The artist was accepted as a superior artisan.

Grinding pigment, priming grounds in his workshop, the old master had but little patience with problems of pure esthetic.

It is told of Giotto, the great medieval muralist, that while walking in the streets of Florence he was bowled over by a runaway hog.

People marveled when he rose up and dusted his clothes laughing.

"Pigs' bristles have made me a rich man," he said. "Yet never have I done anything in return for pigs. Let this teach me a lesson in gratitude."

Giotto made his own brushes out of pigs' bristles. The tie between art and pigs was, in his case, a natural.

In our day, the chasm is wide between the concept of art and the concept of craft. The Fine Arts and the applied arts are barely on speaking terms.

The capital letters needed to correctly spell "Fine Arts" imply a holier-than-thou attitude in relation to the applied arts.

Industrial and chemical progress ease the artist into forgetting that he also is a craftsman.

## The ignorance of painters

Today, a painter need not know how to prime a canvas or grind pigments. He would not attempt to make his own brushes.

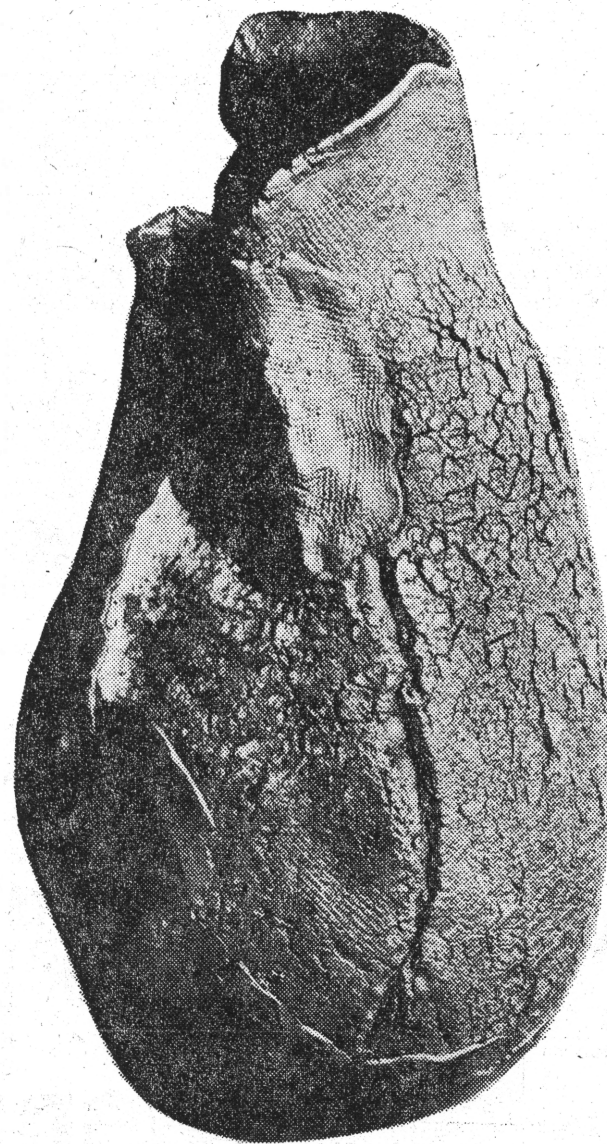
Some painters hardly know what it is they buy when they buy tubes of color.

This indifference to the realities of his craft frees the artist from what some may consider crass minutiae.

His mind may wander at will through the vastness of esthetic fields.

Today, a painter's thoughts turn first on how best to exteriorize an inner image, patterned after his own id or ego.

Should "epater les bour-



A pot made of raku clay and Kentucky ball clay, with salt glaze, by Uyehara.

geois" be the artist's aim? Or should he strive to achieve an even more esoteric goal, that of "epater les artistes"?

It is only too easy to go off track in such subtle matters!

In a way, in our day, the ancient concept of art as a craft is better illustrated by the applied arts than by the Fine Arts.

This is why it is pleasant to review a pottery show, the work of a good craftsman.

Sam Uyehara knows intimately the diverse sorts of clays he manipulates. He is not afraid of dirtying his hands at his art.

His ambition is to collaborate with the earth and the water that go into the making of his pots, and with the fire that heats his kiln.

Never would he think of pitting his will against the grain of nature.

In the middle ages, a famous scholastic formula stated that art is the serving maid of theology. The statement would give an apoplectic stroke to many a contemporary artist.

Nevertheless its soundness is proved by the not inconsiderable output of art that makes the gothic cathedrals things of beauty.

As a throwback to another and saner period, pottery too is made to serve.

The ceramist makes dishes to eat from, pitchers to pour from, planters to grow plants in.

Again here the applied arts have alone retained the quality of service they once shared with the Fine Arts.

## Pieces large and small

The range of Uyehara's ceramics is vast. It goes from pieces thrown on a heroic scale — I was going to say a mural scale — to true miniatures meant as trials for future works.

Textures range from polished glazes reminiscent of palatial Ming and Ching to grainy surfaces rough as crocodile hides.

Forms vary from delicately thrown bottles topped by long and fragile necks to lumped forms that could be those of rocks or boulders.

My own favorites are rough and asymmetrical. Their apparent coarseness is achieved by sophisticated technical means.

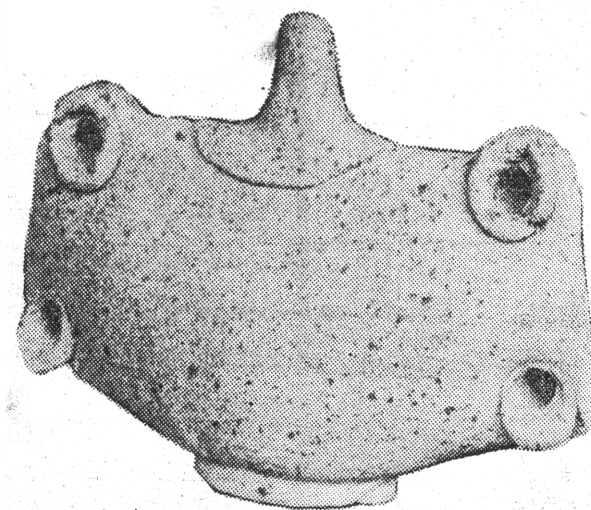
Uyehara throws a cloak of dry clay over a form just emerged out of wet clay. This outer skin rolls itself into rough granules.

Then, pushing the walls of the pot from inside outwards, the potter "explodes" them into fissures and furrows, not unlike the bark of an ancient tree.

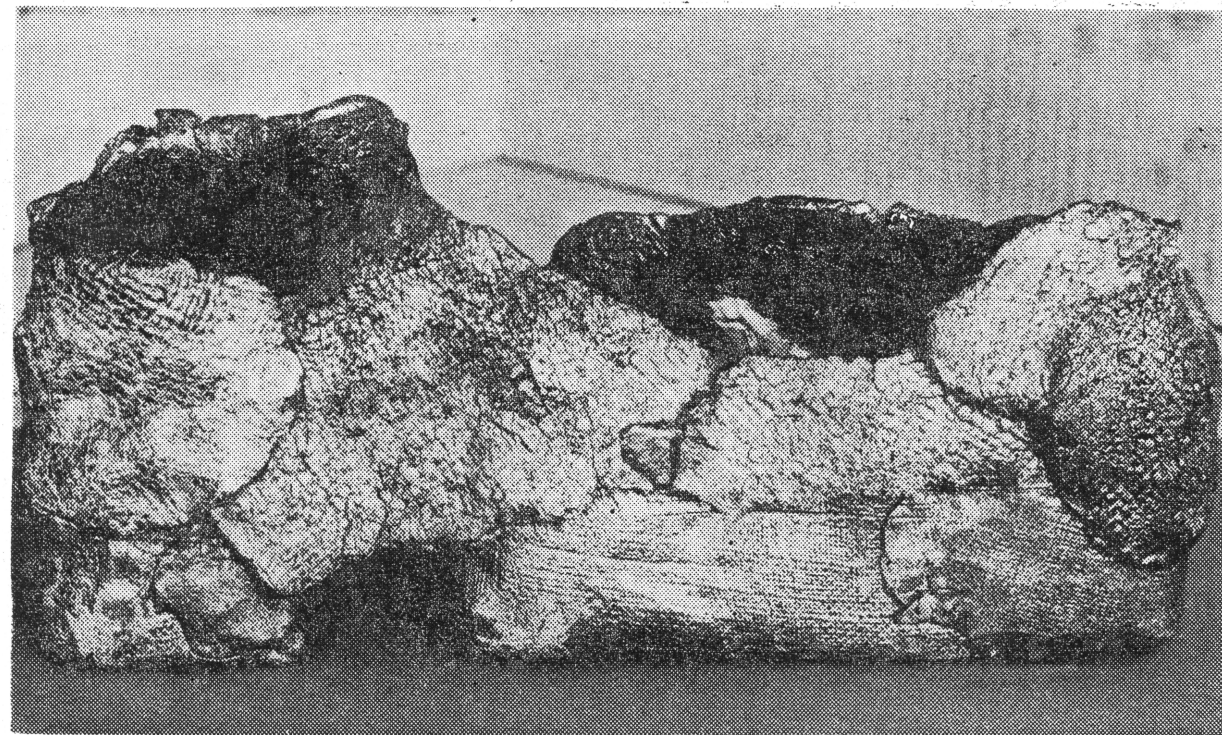
For a design, he presses burlap cloth against the soft clay that receives the imprint of its weave.

Uyehara severely restricts his gamut of glazes.

He shies away from hues such as apple green, peach bloom, or clair-de-lune, that carry aristocratic connotations.



An unglazed bottle of raku clay, with four eyes



A burlap-textured planter by Sam Uyehara.

## The tones of nature

He prefers to use a similar chemistry to suggest nature's own palette of erosion, rust stains, and moss patterns.

Undoubtedly, Uyehara has a touch of zen in his make-up. His wisdom in not attempting to outdo nature, his wise use of raku clay, conjure a climate of tea ceremony.

A Jesuit missionary, reporting to Rome from Japan in the 17th century, described the admiration that tea bowls elicited from connoisseurs. He wistfully admitted that, in the Europe of his day, these priceless masterpieces would be held worthless. At best, said he, they could be used for bird baths!

It is trite to say that Hawaii partakes of both cultures, Occidental and Oriental.

But still it is pleasant to realize that Uyehara's ce-

ramics are not for us mere objects d'art, but are part and parcel of our mode of life.

## Small group needs attention

Come and gone — it lasted only three days — is the show of paintings and drawings organized by the Leeward Shores Association.

Held at the Moanalua Shopping Center, this small show, informally presented, had some fine features.

Linda Frederick's "Brooding Pele" is a serious attempt to visualize Hawaiian myths.

Genevieve Millet's "Bouquet on a Hot Summer Afternoon," in brooding browns, realizes this near impossibility: to paint sunflowers without reminding one of Van Gogh!

Henriette L. Leigh's "Time Was . . ." is a successful evocation of mood.

And for my granddaughter Malia, aged 4, whom I intend to visit at Christmas, I bought Toni Matthew's "Pili-kia," a pleasant kitty picture.

Our State Foundation on Culture and the Arts could fruitfully assist this small and brave group of artists. Their aim, to decentralize the arts, is also the aim of our State Association.

Had they lived on some other Island, help could have been more readily forthcoming.



LEEWARD ART—This pen and ink drawing by Pat Sherman, titled "Grandma's Quilt," was shown at the Leeward Shores Association exhibition at the Moanalua Shopping Center.