Brilliant Colors and Raw Fury

At the Galleries

Alden Mason's "Blue Mover," in oil, at the Sawyer

By Alfred Frankenstein

Alden Mason of Seattle has been painting for a long time, and the maturity of his achievement shines through his works at the William Sawyer Gallery like the proverbial good deed in a naughty world.

His canvases are very large and are made opaque with heavy coats of gesso. The paint, thinly applied, takes on an extraordinary luminosity by virtue of this technique. The brilliance of the color is matched by its apparent liquidity as large and small forms, freely shaped, melt into each other and convey an over-all sense of movement.

Dr. Sawyer tells me that Mason has expressed himself as being especially taken with the bright colors and forms on seed packets, and it is easy enough to see these transformed heroically in Mason's canvases. Some may have seen them as bright stones under water, and an analogy to the pearly surfaces and mysterious shapes of Yves Tanguy is not beyond imagining.

I suspect that Mason would not object to all these parallels, provided they are mentioned only as parallels; the main thing is that these are superbly beautiful works by a past master of his craft.

Mason's current work at Sawyer's (which, by the way, is at 3045 Clay street) represents a dramatic shift in style for this artist, but not so dramatic a shift as in the work of Dominic Faralla at the San Francisco Museum of Art. Everyone in San Francisco knows Faralla as a brilliant sculptor and assemblagist in wood, but there is only one wood piece in the new show. It centers on the human figure, but approached in a way no one had ever seen before. Half of these figures are torn raw from corrugated cardboard, dabbed with paint and stuck together with Heaven knows what; the result is a curious combination of violence and richness, not unlike the ray guns and similar things with which Claes Oldenburg stocked his "store" 20 years ago.

The other figures are monotypes, ranging from almost-realism to a complete abstraction like that of Oriental calligraphers in a creative fury. But some of the figures emerge from darkness in a mysterious and fascinating way. Faralla knows serenity as well as fury, and is equally convincing in both moods.

Elmer Bischoff requests a correction of the statement made in these columns last week to the effect that his current exhibition at the San Francisco Art Institute is his first in 20 years. It is his first local show of paintings since 1961, but in the interim he has shown paintings in the East and drawings here.