

is for Artist

On Friday, the eighth 'Manifestation Biennale et Internationale des Jeunes Artistes'—known for short as the Paris Biennale—opens in the Musée d'art moderne in Paris. It is a form of exhibition which is little used in this country. Roland Miller assesses its significance for British art.

The Seventh Biennale in 1971 encouraged experiment; there was apparently nothing you couldn't do (except inevitably an overt political attack on France), and even the national groupings were not definitive (within the Dutch group of artists there were three of us British performers).

This year the selections have been rearranged so that there are no national groupings, and commissioners from nine countries have selected across the world. The chosen British artists are: Stephen Buckley, John Cobb, John Davies, Tam MacPhail, and Carl Plackman. There is also to be an audio-visual section, to which artists were invited to contribute information about their work. This has been handled in this country by the British Council.

A good thing for London?
In December last year a series of monthly meetings of all the British artists chosen for this section began in London. Apart from sending slides and film to Paris, the eight individuals and groups were given expenses to make the trip over there. It was also suggested that a newspaper should be published, at the Bi-

ennale, on the lines of the excellent Italian *Flash Art*. The result is called *Brique*, 8 pages, one for each artist or group represented. Like *Flash Art*, it is in tabloid form, black and white, and has statements from artists, rather than advertisements placed on their behalf by art entrepreneurs.

Like the Biennale itself, this newspaper contains a complex mixture: sculpture simply photographed without comment, a series of photographs of landscape and running figure, pictures and statements on performances, poetry—each artist expresses him or her self freely within the form offered.

If that is indeed the ideal of a large supranational mixed exhibition, it could be a good thing for London. Britain has so far the well-established Bradford Print Biennale—and this fidelity to one form seems to be a national characteristic.

Work shown overseas is handled by the British Council, who do their job with discretion, tact, and infinite enthusiasm—particularly for new forms of visual art, in which this country is more highly respected abroad than at home.

A 'Biennale' type show in this country would have to be arranged by the Arts Council of Great Britain. They did give us, in 1971, the series of Arts Spectra—occurring in all regions.

The Artist in the Flesh
The London Spectrum, at Alexandra Palace in August '71, was a splendid array of different forms and artists, many of whom were there to talk to baffled or excited visitors. The presence of artists, alive and communicative, whether actually performing their works or simply minding them, is a very crucial part of the progression of art out of the drawing rooms of the privileged into the world of people. Also, artists meeting artists is not so common—the objective of the Paris Biennale is to 'give artists of all nationalities, aged between 20 and 35 years, the opportunity to present their own work and compare it with that of others'.

What has happened since Art Spectrum London and all the Regional Spectra (summer '71) is 'The New Art' exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in Summer '72, and after that (summer '74), there is to be a big painting show involving (like 'The New Art') the individual selection of one person, but then developing differently, tree-like, through painters recommending other painters.

So, like the twice-yearly John Moores painting competition in Liverpool, these 'Biennales' are single form exhibitions. ('The New Art' was largely conceptual, in the sense that there were more words about and records of perceptive processes than actual art works in a direct, crude, object or human shape. You got the artists' conception before or after their experience, instead of the vital experience itself). Unfortunately, adherence to one form for a representative exhibition

suggests a superiority of that form at that time. I don't believe that sculpture is 'better' than painting, or performance more worthwhile than conceptualism—there are fertile things in all forms, more in some at times than in others, but the elusive thing we call art can spurt up anywhere.

We have also had (summer '72) the 'Festival at the Serpentine' including performances, moving sculpture, and sound pieces, and in the autumn and winter '72 there was the 'Survey of the Avant Garde' in many parts at Gallery House (R.I.P.). This year there is currently the Peter Moores' 'Magic and Strong Medicine' show in Liverpool.

These last three exhibitions, festivals, gatherings, call them what you will, all share in some small way the quality of the '71 Paris Biennale—they bring together artists, their experiences, and the 'public', and that is the process that keeps art alive. We need more of it.

Notes

'Magic & Strong Medicine' Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Until October 28.

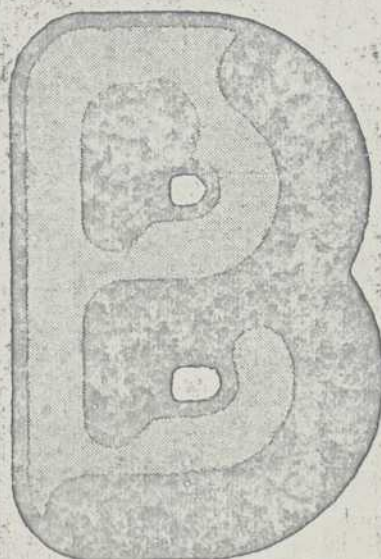
Performance work—Sept 10–16 and October 4–7.

Day return, Euston to Liverpool: £5.40 (after 9.30 am Mon-Fri). Average journey 3 hours.

'8th Paris Biennale' Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris.

Musée national d'art moderne, Musée Galliera. Sept 14–October 21.

Train and boat return, Victoria to Paris: overnight Sept 14, 15, 16: £9.90. Weekends after that date: out on Fri or Sat, back Sun or Mon, any crossing except the night boat, approx £11 return. Standby flights bookable the evening before, West London Air Terminal, about £15.



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