

# ARGUS de la PRESSE

Tél. : 742-49-46 - 742-98-91

21, Bd Montmartre - PARIS 2<sup>e</sup>

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## Paris Biennale

### West Coast winner

by MARIO AMAYA

What are the French up to? The Fifth Paris Biennale of young artists at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris has awarded this year's gold medal to an American, Lynn Foulkes—a West Coast artist whose paintings are entirely unknown in Europe and whose relevance to the international art scene at the moment is slight.

In giving Foulkes the prize, it is hard to decide whether the international committee guided by André Malraux, is way ahead of the game in recognising certain neo-figurative attitudes which incorporate both kitsch and Funk in what is fast developing into a "California School," or whether they just want to show that art has no national boundaries.

Both reasons are valid, and as post-Pop figuration goes Foulkes, who is 33, looks like a strong new contender in the U.S. needle match between East Coast and West. Unfortunately, it is difficult to judge the merits of an artist on the evidence of five paintings.

Actually the prize might have been given not to one, but to the contingent of four Americans in Paris (all of them from the West Coast), since the U.S. pavilion was by far the most clear-minded and concise one there. The two painters, Foulkes and Ed Ruscha, complement each other perfectly: Foulkes' subtle sepia taken from post-cards is a perfect foil for the strident lettering of Ruscha, stencilled on solid black—i.e.: the word DAMAGE actually going up in flames. On the other side are two minimal sculptors: John MacCracken's giant slabs of fibre glass uniformly coloured and leaning against the wall play with Craig Kaulman's plexiglass pressouts, which are reminiscent of shaped outdoor advertising signs, despite their cool.

Among the four runners-up, who include Walter Leblanc (Belgium), Umberto Penna (Cuba) and Francisco Salazar (Venezuela), Mark Boyle of Great Britain is easily the most outstanding. His wide expanses of pebbles and dirt and found objects fixed permanently, have a compelling textural quality which makes you either want to stroke them or walk over them barefoot. That he won a prize at all was remarkable since the British section displayed a confused state of selection and a monstrously inappropriate sense of scale.

Barry Flanagan's huge sand-filled sacks and coil of rope with

floor cut-out dominated the space allotted, and Michael Sandle's black enamelled cenotaph was so large it had to be placed in another hall. John Furnival's poem-screens and word wheels did not sit happily alongside Jeremy Moon's Stella-stripes, and Colin Self's delicate pencil and water-colour drawings were so overwhelmed by the bigness of the other works that they looked like postage stamps on the wall. It was a relief to turn a corner and see the dynamic directness of Patrick Caulfield's prints.

Of the other sections, the French win first prize for finding the messiest group of poor artists ever assembled—acres and acres of floorspace devoted to sixth-form jokes and sub-student level copies of artists who are themselves indifferent.

Japan produced a nice whimsical assortment of visual tricks, including Takamatsu's three-dimensional furniture seen in perspective and set down on a raked and receding floor (a sly attack on the over-importance that illusionary perspective has played in western art?) and Miki's giant coloured ears in plastic, the size of a man and untouchable in their prison of vitrines. The Italian section was notable for its constructivist group experiments and its post-Surreal works, the former best exemplified by Pino Pascali's geometrical trays of water coloured with dye, the latter by Pistoletto's mirror-steel surfaces with life-like figures applied, the same size as the reflections of ourselves which we measure them against.

The major tendency, if one is to be found in this gigantic pile-up of works from 56 countries, seems to be a sort of detached semi-surrealism, stemming out of Pop, yet returning to the ambiguities, the paradoxes in what we perceive to be real, what we think of as real, and what our minds tell us is not. There is also an indication that young artists appear to be ready now to accept and deal with the kitsch trivia of our age using the same analytical lines of experimentation as did Cézanne in examining his apples. The taste barrier has at last been broken, they seem to be telling us, now let's see if there is anything worthwhile on the other side.

In this context, the spirit of Magritte, who recently died, hovers over the Musée d'art Moderne like a distressed poltergeist wanting only to be laid to rest.

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DERNIERE HEURE  
BRUXELLES  
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Ce tableau — qui pourrait s'appeler « Contraste » — a été pris au cours de la cinquième biennale de Paris, au musée d'art moderne de la ville.

