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Paris Biennale

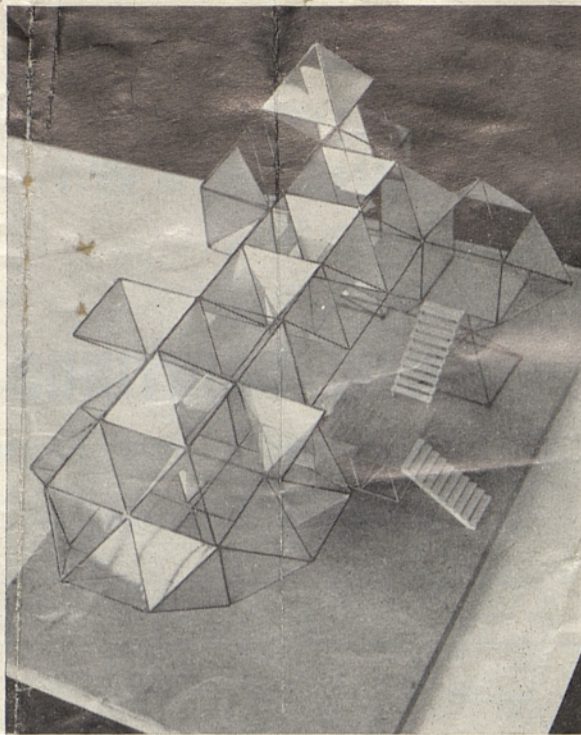
KENNETH COUTTS-SMITH 200

In the recent months one has heard reports of the impact that the British section of the 3rd Paris Biennale has had in terms of critical opinion and the enthusiasm of the younger French artists and students. In two current exhibitions we have a chance to see for ourselves and to re-assess what is virtually an image of our society; since, after all these works constitute one image that this country has decided to present as representative of our current sensibility. The fact that these are selected works from an official representation is I think an important thing to bear in mind, for the manifestations of 'pop' and 'environmental' art cannot now be viewed with the same eyes while we are aware that they have become by virtue of choice and official acceptance endemic to, and descriptive of, our society.

This thought raises questions and speculations that cannot possibly be discussed in an article of this length. It would be an interesting and possibly valuable, though obviously localised, paper were someone to arrive at conclusions regarding the social structure of this country at the present time from the evidence merely of these two artistic phenomena.

I will, however, attempt to summarise briefly my reactions, bearing in mind that on this occasion I am thinking less aesthetically than sociologically; but I must first comment that the exhibition at the Royal College consists of the work of five 'pop' artists, Blake, Boshier, Hockney, Jones and Phillips, and that the exhibition at the I.C.A. is of group projects from the schools of Corsham, St. Martin's, Leeds and King's College, Newcastle.

PETER BLAKE *The Girlie Door* 1959 collage 48 x 23 1/4 ins. This was included in the 3rd Paris Biennale, 1963. Royal College of Art.

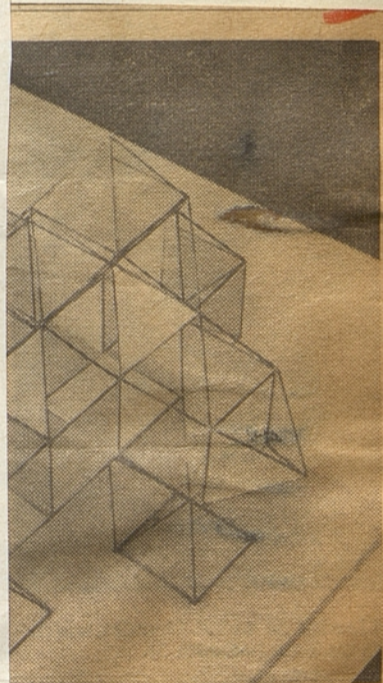


City of Leeds College of Art *Project* designed by students under the direction of Harry Thubron and Dennis Harland. Included in the exhibition 'Five Group Projects' at the I.C.A. Gallery.

First, at the Royal College, my reactions (within the terms that I have indicated) are primarily that these works are trivial; they evince wit and charm, nostalgic eroticism, sophisticated irony, fantasy seasoned with trite moralising and often a throw-away grace, amusing and entertaining certainly, but essentially trivial, and worse, ephemeral — one suspects that, like the popular entertainment that is allied to them, their comments will be valid for only a season. It is an emasculated version of the violent and committed American 'pop' which Denis Bowen has described so graphically as 'Sick Realism', the teeth have been drawn, and if the form of creativity that is officially supported by a society is one that traces visual arabesques so existentially disassociated we should tremble for that society.

The manifestation at the I.C.A. is of a different order. This is a series of maquettes for environmental structures conceived and executed by a collaboration of various artistic disciplines. One is immediately struck by the artists' consciousness of new technological methods and materials; unlike the essentially escapist nostalgia of 'pop', here is an awareness of facts such as that electronics, plastics and certain machinery have effected a radical change in our lives and sensibilities in recent years.

The structures from Leeds College (owing a debt to Buckminster Fuller's concept of Tensegrity) and from St. Martin's suggest the germs of a new and valid urban environment, such as architects have so far, for the most part, been only able to present acceptably as temporary exhibition buildings.



d'équipe (works of collaboration exhibited at the 1963 Paris Biennale from Bath Academy of Art, appeared earlier in these pages,

are on view at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 17-18, Dover Street, London, until February 15. They include Leeds College of Art's "internal external architectural object" (which, as a secondary consideration, can be used as a gallery), shown above, and a strange structure covered in a plastic skin on the theme of "Birth-Life-Death", from St. Martin's School of Art, London; the latter is accompanied by music.