

## ARTS / LEISURE

## Paris Biennale Shows Off Villette Hall

By Michael Gibson  
International Herald Tribune

PARIS — The New Paris Biennale is something of an event, not least because it is in the splendidly refurbished ox-shed of the former slaughterhouse at La Villette, next to the future Museum of Science and Technology. The building, which covers more than two hectares (five acres), was completed in 1867 by Jules de Mérimod in a style akin to that of Victor Baltard's Les Halles, the former market in the center of Paris. De Mérimod's structure has been turned into an aerial glass building with a broad, wing-like roof and endowed with sophisticated equipment that allows it to accommodate a broad range of events. It is clearly one of the most successful achievements of its kind in recent decades.

The biennale — this is the 13th — is a departure in several respects. Its budget has been increased tenfold from the last exhibition, to 10 million francs (about \$1 million), it has found a permanent and independent base at La Villette and the directors have decided to abolish the age limit: Until now it was open only to artists under 35. All this implies a new concept, and shows the determination of the French officials running such cultural ventures to consolidate the position of Paris on the international art scene, a position that has been questioned in recent years. One official recently declared that the biennale should strive to become the French counterpart of the Documenta exhibitions in Kassel, West Germany — an ambitious goal.

It should be borne in mind that the biennale belongs to a peculiar

category of official manifestations that are created and kept going by public funding. This implies that it does not depend on public taste and does not have to appeal to any particular audience. What it does need is the approval of its peers. As such it leads an autonomous life, sustained by its symbiotic link with the other big international shows, on the Continent at least, and with the state of the art market in general. As a result it is governed by a consensus of the art world and cannot be expected to do much more than acknowledge the primacy of trends or of individual artists in the commercial circuits and in the other shows.

Another result is that there is a certain sameness in the art we are likely to see in Venice, Kassel or Paris. What differences exist are due to the perspective given by location; there will be more French artists in Paris, though not as many as some officials of the Culture Ministry would like.

In former years participants were selected by national committees and presented under national labels. This year the selection was entrusted to a commission made up of a West German, an Italian, an American and two French members, and the participant's nationality is stated only in the catalog. This arrangement and the small number of people on the commission give the show greater coherence.

The exhibition is divided into three sections — visual arts, sound and architecture. The visual art section occupies the largest part of the big structure, and a number of works were especially designed to fill the tremendous space of the

central nave. The English artists Gilbert and George, for instance, are represented by a photomontage panel ("Death After Life") 4.84 by 11.11 meters (5.27 by 12.11 yards). Daniel Buren of France constructed an inverted pyramid in striped cloth that, at 12 by 17 meters, pretty well fills up the center of the building. Roberto Matta of Chile sent a continuous sequence of canvases 19 meters long, referring to a tale by the Colombian poet Jorge Zalamea.

As might be expected, the exhibition stresses the return to figurative art that characterizes the French "Figuration Libre" (for example, Hervé di Rosa), the German "Wilde Malerei" (Georg Baselitz), the Italian "Transavanguardia" (Sandro Chia) the American Neo-Expressionists (Julian Schnabel) and graffiti artists (Keith Haring is scheduled to paint the inside of the Porte de Pantin Métro station).

In all these areas the production is uneven. There is much that is silly, gratuitously loud-mouthed and pointless to the limit of tedium. But there are also a number of works that are outstandingly interesting. Susan Rothenberg of the United States has a strong painting of rather ghostly ships on a black ground; Anselm Kiefer of West Germany effectively uses black and brown and thick texture (paint mixed with straw and stripes of wood) in extremely large canvases full of symbolic implications.

Enzo Cucchi of Italy has a large assemblage of driftwood and scrap metal that is monumental and rather more engaging than the rest of his work shown here. Christian Boltanski of France is showing a deliciously immaterial piece, a little

shadow theater that dances on the four walls of the room.

With the biennale now open to artists over 35, its organizers have decided, setting aside restrictive considerations of mere fashion, to honor a number of artists who are still active in their 80s and 90s. Most were chosen because they kept working in a figurative vein when this was anathema. Their dean is the Polish painter and writer Joseph Czapski, 90. He is closely followed by Jean Hélion of France and Evert Lundquist of Sweden, both 82. Henri Michaux, the Belgian artist who died last year in Paris at 85, is represented by about 30 works done in his last two years.

The generation in between is represented by such artists as Gabriel Stupica, Pierre Bettencourt, Leon Golub, Antoni Tàpies and Co Westerik.

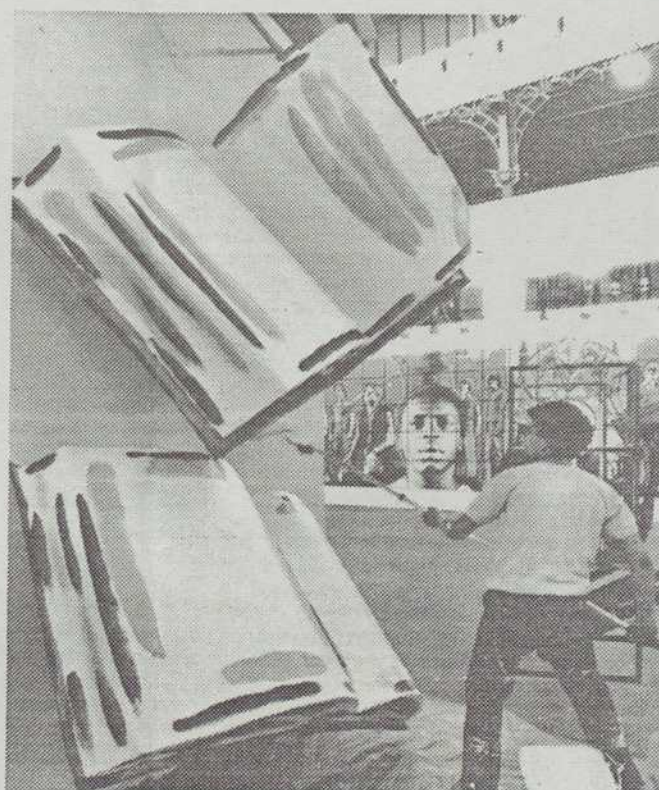
The biennale's sound section presents works by John Cage, Connie Beckley, Takis, Zev, and Bill Fontana. A Luciano Berio opera, several rock concerts and two dance evenings will be held in the 2,000-seat concert area at the north end of the building. The architectural section of the show opens April 1.

"Nouvelle Biennale de Paris," Grande Halle, Parc de la Villette, Porte de Pantin, through May 21.

#### ■ Ero 85: Good Taste

The exhibits at Ero 85, Paris's third annual exhibit of erotica, range from photos and paintings to costumes and a variation on traditional French pastries, United Press International reports. The French are flocking for a peek, through Sunday.

"This year there is less Moulin Rouge and more Louvre," said the



Sculpture by Julian Opie goes up at Paris Biennale.

publicity director, Catherine Deboisfroget. "Perhaps next year we will bring back a little of the popular burlesque style. But it is definitely not pornography."

Nevertheless, giggles abound at the pastry shop, where a sales clerk said customers had been eager to buy pastel-colored almond-paste cakes formed into lips, hearts and, other shapes. The shop also turns out made-to-order cakes.

Visitors to Ero 85 must be at least 18, but, despite the presence of graphic "objets d'art" by some

of the 300 exhibitors, Philippe Renard, the fine-art and antique dealer who organized this year's convention, said bad taste, obscenity and pornography were screened out.

There is an exhibit of Man Ray photographs, a 16th-century tapestry and an exhibit of sexy costumes and clothes.

There are photos of ladies in lingerie, silhouette images of naked female forms, magazines, 50-year-old fashion drawings, antique postcards and even a "cuvée erotique" — red wine at 20 francs a bottle.

## Rome: Antonio Donghi And the City's 'Popolino'

By Edith Schloss  
International Herald Tribune

ROME — After the turbulence and experimentation in art before and after World War I, a relatively stable period set in during the 1920s.

One of the most incisive and captivating of the new realists in Italy was Antonio Donghi, who painstakingly observed his friends and neighbors. Over his Roman river-scapes there are no bright blue Italian skies, nor is sunlight immediately welcome in his sparse, dusky interiors. The washerwoman, the seamstress next door, the young girls at their outings on the Tiber, the tradespeople are contemplated evenly, not in a fleeting moment of their lives but at their most complete and best, in repose and integrity.

Donghi was born in Rome in 1897, the son of a cloth merchant. His parents separated and he was put in a children's home. After studying at the academies of Rome and Florence, he participated in the exhibitions of the new realists in Italy, and in 1927 took part in a show at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh.

For anyone who has been in Rome and gotten acquainted with the *Popolino*, the people of the streets, with their roughness, wisdom and cool fatalism, not only Caravaggio's canvases of mythical and religious events but also Donghi's people at the opposite side of the spectrum must have a special meaning.

The young women, sitting sagely in bedrooms and not in studios, the

brides, the cabaret musicians and clowns, painted in undramatic poses, look at the viewer sensibly, but also with pride and sweetness. Neither pretentious nor too happy, they are reasonably content with their work and lot. Donghi, who kept his private life to himself, expressed the feelings of others with modesty, in pictures of smooth outline and dark jewel colors.

Some of the oils of the last years, rather fussy and of obsessive detail, hardly seem to be from his hand. But most give us a wonderful view of a fine realist and his period.

"Antonio Donghi, 60 paintings from 1922 to 1961," Palazzo Braschi, Piazza Pantaleone, through April 21.

Ernesto Tatafiore, inspired by his native city, is a witty Neapolitan who uses the devices of folk art for his own sly purpose. Depicting Vesuvius by itself or spouting profiles of Mozart or Pompeian ladies, he paints the volcano and its lava streams in flat smoldering reds against glum, gunmetal-gray skies, adding floating letters or sentences as a whimsical touch. The pictures are by no means naive, but quite wry and knowing. Despite the tongue-in-cheek attitude, the allusions to the platitudes of historical data and figures, there is something truly charming and serious here. Tatafiore's jolly and sinister views are an intelligent appreciation of the world he has to live with.

"Ernesto Tatafiore," Galleria Il Ponte, Via S. Ignazio 6, through April 21.