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Paris Gallery Shows Middle-Aged Spread

By PAUL WALDO SCHWARTZ

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PARIS, Sept. 13—With September sounding reveille for the art world the Musee Galliera had launched the season's first major campaign. This takes the shape of an exhibition for painters now working in Paris. But it adds one Procrustean condition—that they all be of 36 to 50.

The prerequisite is a bit like those New York bomb shelters that read "Capacity 346". You wonder what happens if the mushroom rises and you happen to be number 347.

Thirty-six to 50 would be past it for Raphael and yet hasty for the best of Cezanne. The idea, however, was that since the coming Paris Biennale is limited to ages 25 to 35, (past it for Giorgione or Rimbaud), the Galliera would up the mark a mite.

Still, those over 50 need not apply, ripe old age for a left fielder but not for a painter. No room this time, is the Galliera's surprising answer. And when you think of what a senior citizen Titian became during plague year it seems injudicious.

'Promises Kept'

Nevertheless, since the French have a genius for turning a compromise into an imperative, the show has been dubbed "Promises Kept". What the occasion in fact produces is a kind of postscript to those years 10 years ago when pure abstraction was everything.

At that time, external reality was taboo, the inner urge paramount. "Promises Kept" traces the road back from euphoria along the way of signs, symbols, abstraction and a search for other frames of reference.

There are those painters, like Riopelle, Appel and Mathieu, who have changed not at all. And there are

those who have even veered off toward Pop.

Everyone will pick out favorites but there is a phrase of Andre Gide's that seems hauntingly appropriate. Some 30 years ago Gide remarked, "We are wallowing in the appropriate." Between the stocks that fizzle and the abstract fares that burst in uncommunicative static, there comes to pass a blurred and very approximate sensation indeed.

One fascinating exception in point is the work of Georges Noel, exponent of the European "Informel" group.

Genuine Touch

Noel's painting refers to ancient surfaces and recondite inscriptions in a way that ought theoretically to be false or stagey. The method is part of an obviously desperate need to touch upon some articulate vocabulary, to voice anew the silence behind objects and colors.

But desperate or not, the Noel touch is genuine and, in its authenticity, genuinely touching. Which is one so much misses in the Galliera's anthology of color and idiom.

The modern burden upon each individual painter to construct his own philosophy and vocabulary from scratch is a crushing mandate. Perhaps this generation, the 36 to 50 crowd, had it worst of all. Seldom were greater claims made for impromptu expression than during the 1940's and '50's when reality, seen as tyranny, came into ill repute. Seldom were greater opportunities opened of the approximate.

Thus, the Galliera's selection, however arbitrary, makes a wistful epilogue. It also makes the coming response of the Biennale especially pointed.

The exhibition runs to Oct. 11, except Tuesday. Admission is two francs.