

Paris Biennale Shows A Surprising Diversity

By Michael Gibson

PARIS, Sept. 23 (LHT).—The Biennale de Paris, which opened at the Musée d'Art Moderne, Avenue du Président Wilson (to Nov. 1), last week is an international venture devoted to artists under 35.

The age clause distinguishes it from the other big encyclopedic undertakings, like "Documenta," for instance, because here we have art in the bud—in other words, ideally, art before it gets into a movement.

There is consequently little that can be asserted collectively about the participants. The organizers have devoted space—and time—to "video art" and are presenting the visitor with a historic overview of this relatively new technique. A special section is devoted to Latin America and the artists of that continent are consequently shown apart from the rest of the Biennale.

But their participation is hardly serene and four young Mexican collectives have published their own catalogue, with a foreword by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, just to make it clear that they do not like being invited by a Uruguayan (who happens to have been put in charge of the Latin American section) in view of the political situation in that country.

The Movements

Having spoken of "art in the bud" one is nonetheless obliged to remark that artists tend to be born into a movement.

The advantage of the current phase in this respect is that all doors having, it would seem, been broken down, the public is

ready to receive communication from practically any medium. This means that the notion of "movement" appears dated—up to a point.

Looking at some of the works that hold one's attention at the present Biennale, one is surprised at the diversity of it all. Take Canole. He makes excellent color photos of games—by no means humorless games—he plays with nature. The result is something quite fresh, and if he uses peeled bananas in a wooded setting, they strike the viewer as a new botanical or animal species, both amusing and poetic.

Swedish participant Anders Aberg has created a sort of mini-Tivoli of revolutionary lyricism, with pieces devoted to a Swedish slum, Charlie Chaplin and various other subjects. This is a sort of new shape of folk art that dares to break out of the folk-art stereotypes of form and utility. It is also rather perishable and in the present case, that is just as well: Its plain vitality is in the present, not at all 100 years from now.

Top Draftsman

Eileen Lawrence's work is marked by the delicacy of her draftsmanship and her ability to use elements of precious refinement without their getting out of hand.

Her long, screenlike works show alignments of feathers, eggs and twigs (all drawn) in a collage setting of sumptuous, handmade paper.

Filippo Avalor brings complexity and its delights with a large work of plexiglass, glass, mirrors and drawings. Portions of the glass cover are frosted so that one

glimpses the inside through the clear parts and the slanted mirrors that are set behind them.

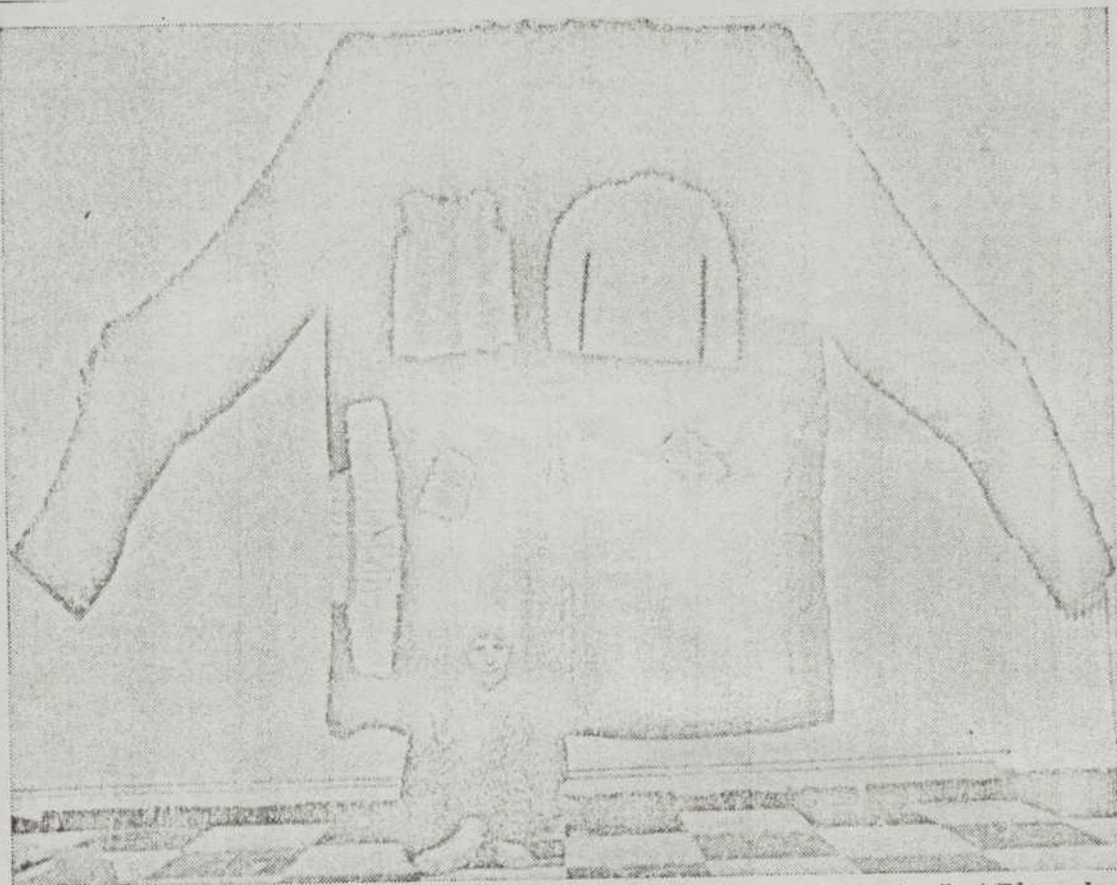
There is also much that is more predictable. Many of the participants dwell on the intolerable realities of the world—violence (private and political), repression, the conquering desert of anonymity, etc.—which they feel make a mockery of any attempt at artistic creativity. Some, like the French Groupe Untel, bring wit to the treatment of this sort of subject by using packaging under plastic and the supermarket technique of presentation to stress the impersonality of urban life in Paris and its suburbs.

There is a fair amount of painting, much of it rather arid and some of it vacuously raucous. Dominique Thiolat appears to be emerging as a talent, and Andre Salamon's dye-stain tachism is pleasing to look at.

There is much painting in the Latin American section—a good deal of it baroque and tormented. Jorge Alvaro's circus figures are baroque, but they also have a certain warmth and serenity to them.

Among the most outstanding and convincing contributions are Robert Helms's fetish boxes, which are the work of a master craftsman as well as of an artist of scope.

From the above enumeration it will have become apparent that the present crop of Biennale artists is distinguished by the variety of approaches and techniques. It is also satisfying to observe that morbidity and its attendant nihilism are on the decline. Perhaps, one would like to think, we are emerging from the freeze that has made much recent work so sterile. That is only the hope of a hope, however, like that expressed by a German couple, Renate and Hilmer Lintow, who sent in a collection of magazine photos which, as they say, beneath the stereotype, represent the desirable and attainable hopes of mankind.



Artist Raymonde Arcier, presenting her "Héritage, les tricots de ma mère," at Biennale.