

Extract from  
Guardian, London

25 SEP 1973

## PARIS

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5700

### Youth biennale

"A CERTAIN renewal of painting, more interest in tactile researches, less concern with technology..." These are the tendencies traced in the current Paris Biennale of Young Artists by its coordinator in chief, Georges Boudaille. They are one man's choice of a myriad of directions, for here, as in every Biennale or large-scale international art shindig, it's impossible to draw neat conclusions. One thing is certain: the organisers did try to get away from the petty chauvinism of national sections (as at the Venice Biennale), and from the invention of the spurious isms that are all too often more at home in some critic's mind than in the reality of the work in question (as at Kassel Documenta). The artists exhibiting at this, the Eighth Paris Biennale were selected by an international committee and a series of "correspondents." There are no titles or categories, except for an audiovisual section based round slides, and it's all laid out in a fairly rambling way through the Musée d'Art Moderne and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Taken as a whole, it's a fairly conservative spread. It certainly introduces new names (or maybe I'm weak on, say, Icelandic conceptual art), but also draws heavily on the artists represented by a select handful of galleries. The "renewal" of painting detected by Georges Boudaille and enthusiastically emphasised at the moment by interested galleries and critics in Paris is certainly present. But to call it a renewal is something of a misnomer, since it was going on all the time when presumably they were facing another wind. But for one reason or another, this year has seen a number of international shows devoted to the idea of the "new" painting.

So now the theme pops up at the Biennale, and in 10 days time will be the area investigated by the Düsseldorf "Prospect," which concentrated last time on video and film and is always a fairly acute guide to trends likely to be promoted. At this level the search for novelty and new labels becomes tedious. Will the cohorts rally and change medium? The pundits of Paris say "yes, it's painting, but it's different of course." In the case of Louis Cane,

for instance, the main difference lies in the elaboration of the theory that accompanies it, theories based on historical materialism and Freudianism. Any interpretation of it is based on the notion that you can only get anything out of it if you know all about it in the first place. I've actually seen that written down, and it seems a bit bleak to me.

But there's a myriad of other things going on too, particularly in countries where "official" avant-garde positions are not so quickly or widely adopted. They range right across from the Eastern dialogue between materials and spirit to the tersely provocative statement of the Italian Remo Salvadori: "Energy does not produce images but only itself." Sometimes a real dialogue almost gets going, as in a sequence of rooms featuring large scale environmental pieces. One room contains an array of elements put together by one of the English artists, Carl Plackman, with the title of "Holding a Torch to Icarus": strange, enigmatic juxtapositions that seem to follow a certain logic and then break their own system, successfully creating a lyrical threat that really does communicate with the viewer, raising questions and not pat answers. Materials here are used as a perturbing poetry.

In the next room is a statement by the Korean artist Moon-Seup Shim: "They say that the duality between man and material is at last beginning to move the Western spirit, and that art today tries to overcome it. In the East this problem never existed. In Eastern art the identification of the outer world is revealed all the more if man himself identifies with it, and art becomes a way of being."

Desire to communicate and a sense of urgency about the need for change are at the basis of the forms of art that actively seek an audience rather than existing as an inward-looking activity. It has often been noted that this is more apparent in countries where licence to speak clearly is not given to the artist. Certainly this runs through the work of the Spanish artists represented, analysing the tricks played in the promotion of religious establishments and of governments. And in the countries of the Eastern block, the use of raw photographic documentation tends to be perturbing in a harsher and more direct way, even if the contribution is "anonymous."

This sometimes has a disturbing effect when seen together with the sophisticated fun and games of Western (highly privileged) art. It begs the question of what our artists do with their relatively wide open freedom, and the jokes can pall. In this context it was good to see the British artists who had been placed in the audiovisual section (slides) pulling their contributions together in a communicable way. Many of the slide programmes attempted little more than a flick through what was going on in the various countries, a slide for this and a slide for that, which is both mystifying and indigestible. The conditions imposed for showing these programmes were admittedly pretty impossible, but Marc Chaimowicz, Shirley Cameron, Roland Miller, GASP, Alan Davis, Tim Head, and John Hilliard managed to create a programme that was both expressive of their work and well suited to the medium. This, together with their specially got together publication showed a refreshing will both

to communicate and to widen the field of activity.

Across the road from the two museums the mighty Sonnabend Gallery has taken over an exhibition space as part of the Autumn Festival of Paris. Running simultaneously with the Biennale is therefore a kind of show of strength on the part of one of the most powerful arbiters of the avant-garde in America and Europe.