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Philippe Hiquily at work in his studio.

The Comical Sculpture of Philippe Hiquily

From a Special Correspondent—PARIS

Philippe Hiquily is one of the few postwar sculptors whose work is hilariously funny. In his current exhibition at the Galerie Claude Bernard, Paris, his insect-women and robot men in oxidized metal arouse shouts of laughter, not of derision but of delight. With their smooth swelling contours and needle-thin arms and legs they could be creatures from outer space.

"La Femme Universelle" is armless. Her head—set with a single glass eye—is attached to a stick-like neck bent at a right-angle. The angle is repeated in the kicking leg of the child at her shoulder. The child has no head. The head is eliminated, too, in "La Baronne" and "L'Effroie". It is replaced by a rudimentary knob in "Titot" and by a flat rectangle in "Karl". In "L'Horloge ou La Femme" the head is a clock face balancing on a long filiform neck.

Hiquily has always been entranced by insects and has attempted to reproduce their fragile antennae and rounded carapaces, their symmetry, delicacy and miraculous strength.

In his recent sculptures he now incorporates man-made objects—carburetors, gear transmissions, clock mechanism—which to him appear equally beautiful. In "La Motocyclette" he places a metal nude upon an actual motor bike.

He won the Critics' Prize in 1959 at

the Paris Biennale. Since then, apart from a one-man show in London in 1963 at the Institute of Contemporary Art and an earlier exhibition in New York, he has participated only in mixed groups.

His work is much sought after by collectors, particularly in France and America. Several typical examples of his elegant but fantastic figures are in the Rothschild collection. Roland Penrose in London has a graceful "Antipantin" of 1960. "Stripteaseuse" is in the Guggenheim Museum, New York. In Paris the Musée d'Art Moderne has acquired his work.

A true Parisian, Hiquily was born in 1925 in the Rue Norvins in Montmartre, a few metres from the Place du Tertre. Today he lives on the Left Bank in an unfashionable quarter near the Montparnasse cemetery. His studio resembles a blacksmith's forge. The floor is littered with metal bars, coils of wire, car parts, cog wheels, mallets, and hammers; the walls are covered with diagrams of past and future creations. Oxygen cylinders and a step ladder stand in one corner.

He works in solitude, taciturn, frowning, with a dogged patience and an indifference to public opinion. He comes closest to happiness when he is scrambling over mounds of old iron in the scrap yards in search of raw material.

He has his own secret jokes.