

## ART IN PARIS: Sniffing Out the Future at the Biennale

By Michael Gibson

PARIS, Sept. 17 (IHT).—The 8th Paris Biennale—an international show of artists under 35—opened its doors to the public Saturday (until Oct. 21), this time in the two adjoining Museums of Modern Art (state and municipal), Avenue du Président Wilson. The last biennale had thrown all it had together under a single roof and the effect had been a startling and weirdly festive mélange. This year things are different: The works no longer interfere with one another but stand to be viewed in a classical museum setting that dignifies them and amplifies their impact.

No single statement can cover the whole show. Ninety-six artists and groups from 25 countries have their works displayed (also in the course of the biennale the works of 70 filmmakers and 84 composers will be shown and performed), and the trends represented are most varied, the only unity being in the age limit and the decision of the organizers to exclude those younger artists who have already achieved a measure of recognition through galleries and other exhibitions.

The effect of the whole is that of walking through a strange kaleidoscopic dream pervaded with a certain aura of solitude and of fear. Some environments may be looked on as dreams—or as instant theater. Thus the macabre graveyard of Karin Raack (West Germany) somehow reminiscent of the putrescent world of Ivan Albright's painting; thus Canadian Mark Prent's butchershop ("And is there anything else you'd like, madam?") where bloody parts of the human anatomy are displayed at the counter; thus John Davies's (England) four strangely masked figures standing in immobile and ominous relationship to one another, like a slice out of a Beckett play; thus finally, the vast, dark and elaborate maze lit with candles that Jean Clareboudt (France) has dedicated to (among other people) Paul Thek—who had an engrossing and mystical-symbolic environment of his own at Documenta in Kassel, West Germany, last year—and to Bob Wilson, the director who experiments with time in theater by stretching it to its furthest limits.

### Attic of a Mind

Here the course of initiation runs through the attic of one man's mind, and unity in the random clutter is achieved mainly by the use of sound (endless organ-like chords on tape) and of reduced lighting. The feeling remains dreamlike because the

impact is emotional, the message cryptic, and one is tempted to interpret it as one might a dream from out of one's own psyche. Yet it is also a collective dream (as in the Greek mystery religions) since each visitor sees more or less the same thing. "More or less," for there is an enormous accumulation of objects that also diffuse the visitor's attention and diversify each one's impressions.

Both Thek (at Kassel last year) and Clareboudt appear to respond to a need to alter an urban society's obsessional perception of time by removing one bodily from all that recalls our usual perceptions of space and of relationships between objects.

### More Aggressive

The theatricality of Davies's work is of a different nature because it stands in an unmodified space—except for a great circle marked out on the floor and which the visitor is inclined to avoid stepping into. Such discretion strikes one as all the more unusual since one has to step inside it to get a proper view of at least one of the figures. What Davies presents us with appears

more aggressive because it invades our everyday space with its mysterious situation.

Prent's butchershop is in no way mysterious. It is as obvious and vulgarly effective as a medical student's joke—a direct assault on the spectator's queasiness. Yet it also has a form of theatricality and while one may

wonder which motives prompted the young artist to make this thing, one has no uncertainty as to how it strikes the viewer himself.

There are other dreams too: the drearier technological textbook dreams of artists like Tatsuo Kawaguchi, who has live electric current running through uncovered copper pipes and various contiguous objects and lighting lamps and resistances on the way. Then there is the antiquarian dream of Ann and Patrick Poirier (France), who have reproduced the ruins of Ostia Antica in a 660-square-foot, baked-earth construction. The paintings and sculptures of Czech Ivan Theimer dwell upon termite-like constructions set in a classical landscape.

### Artists or Researchers

The formalist and self-analytical tendencies are also represented, most characteristically by a group of artists (researchers?) from the south of France, who call themselves Groupe 70. They

reflect a concern with the formal relationship between canvas, stretcher and pigment, but I cannot venture to say what all this leads to, sensibility being here subordinated to intellectual formulations.

There are a number of artists who appear to be following in the steps of Mark Rothko, intellectually or aesthetically where Rothko was sensual and dramatic. Rothko's journey covered a path that can only be followed once, and to take his mature simplifications as a point of departure brings the same debilitating facili-

ty as that of starting a career by inheriting a business. The alchemical process of art implies that out of base metal gold can be made, while out of gold, only ashes.

Art of political inspiration is represented by Spaniards such as Alberto Corazon and the two painters of Equipo Cronica and the Chilean Brigada Ramona Parra.

Neither as vast nor polarized by nationalities as is the Venice Biennale, nor as high-powered and intellectually domineering as Documenta, the Paris Biennale does a good job of sniffing out the future. And the future seems to remain in favor of forms that no longer belong to well-defined artistic categories, although painting with traditional material remains well represented.



Ivan Theimer's  
"Grand Trou"  
at the Paris  
Biennale.