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Desiree Moorehead reports on

## THE PARIS BIENNALE

THE SIXTH PARIS Biennale opened on October 2nd to audible moans of disappointment as a blonde nymphet, wrapped in several layers of pink gauze, twirled and pranced before the cameras, slowly unwinding the gauze to disclose, not glorious flesh, but a substantial bra and panties. The rest of the exhibition, though less revealing, is more rewarding and far better exhibited and selected than in previous years. The Museum of Modern Art has also had its walls painted and cracks stopped up, and not before time.

Compared to the previous Biennale, the outstanding change in this is the comparative lack of straight kinetic work or political painting. On the whole, it is quite a sophisticated affair and comes over as a fairly coherent ensemble—no mean feat when one considers the number of artists and ethnical differences involved. However work from the eastern European countries, with the exception of Czechoslovakia, remains immured in a plodding post-Cubist style and although the sculpture includes works realised in beautiful woods and stone, often of impeccable technique, the overall effect is dull and imitative.

### Architecture

Group work, however, is one of the most interesting features, especially in the architectural section, including an impressive model of a university for Dortmund realised by a German group. Judging by what is displayed, architects are determined that our future dwellings will be composed of womb-like modules and cubes. These look quite ingenious and attractive when placed on a well-laid-out maquette but in a hundred years might be no more imaginative than the ubiquitous semi-detached. Still in the architectural section, there is a constant showing of films on a circular screen of some of the plans in actual operation and an added bonus of a community of hippies living in multi-coloured

tetrahedral constructions in what seems to be a state of happy and naked bliss.

### Restful

The Irish contribution to the show is strong and on a par with the best work, although one of Brian King's pieces is badly placed and accumulating a thick layer of dust. His work, however, compares favourably with the rest of the sculpture and he probably will be included amongst the prizewinners. A nagging suspicion remains, however, that the elegance and sobriety of the greater part of modern sculpture is merely a mask hiding an overall lack of plain creativity. The "Fujiyama" of Benni Efrat of Israel, of opposing and contrasting bands of red and purple metal, has a certain timelessness and mystery, and the continuation of the bands along the ground is visually most pleasing. Lamberto Hechanova, Jr., of the Philippines, became the most unfortunate sculptor when his piece went up in flames, causing an influx of policemen and firemen and considerable dirt and excitement.

Still in sculpture, but on the environmental side, the work of Ravelo of Venezuela consists of a large square component divided into smaller rooms, the walls of which are covered with slats of wood about an inch wide and painted white. The rear of these slats is painted alternately blue and yellow and behind these again are long slats of cut mirror so that as one walks along the walls, the blues and yellows flow rapidly by and distort and sway into several dimensions. The general effect is alive but restful, and would be a means of relieving the tedium and ugliness of long corridors.

There are two excellent construction-paintings by an Icelandic artist, Ingi Hauksson, and the Czech contribution features an endearing, enormous ragdoll entitled "The gayest girl in the world." From another Czech, Josep Janovic, there is an ensemble of huge arms, legs and fingers thrusting upwards in deep tones of red and blue and

hovering between an Alice-in-Wonderland fantasia or a more sinister extravaganza. Some of the best painting comes from Germany's L. M. Wintersberger, who shows three large and beautifully composed works of intriguing inside-outside images—very cool and intelligent. The Groupe de Gand from Belgium shows one of the pivotal works of the exhibition in a series entitled "Window Suite", beginning with a row of corridors hung with tri-coloured slats at different angles and ending in three impressive arches in yellow-orange, orange and red composed of outward concentric squares. England's John Walker has a large, fluid mural painting and nearby is the print section, which is altogether disappointing with the exception of the strongly coloured woodcuts from Gilardo Uribe of Mexico.

### Minimal

The French contribution is mostly in the realm of minimal art (or as the Italians call it, *arte povera*) and pretty bare it is too, though there is one amusing piece called "Landscape" featuring a large blue cloud hanging over an enclosed, fenced-in area in which there is a big map of the metro lines. The overall impression generated by the French group is that they are hoping for an imminent showing in New York—English titles and all. Across the road in the Musée Galliera is a show put together by four critics and featuring the work of young artists working in Paris today. Although the pieces assembled there are of the same international variety we have become so familiar with, the quality is good.

Back at the Biennale, and for relaxation, is the Pandora's Box from a French group: a large black chest of drawers with each drawer containing toys, plastic blocks, string wires, etc. and an open invitation to play with the contents. Behind is a black wall on which graffiti can be written but to judge from the results, the premeditated does not rival the spontaneous prose to be seen on the walls of Paris.