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Above, *Le jardin potager de la brigade* by Chan Tchoven-jong. Right, *Snafu Lady* by Bob Evans, by courtesy of Idea Books/Paris Biennale



The 9th Biennale de Paris

Musée de l'Art Moderne, Paris With the final disappearance of the first of the international art exhibitions, the Venice Biennale, those at Kassel, Basel and Paris move into greater prominence. The ninth Paris Biennale (which continues until 2 November) is the second of the re-structured version, and presents a marked improvement in presentation and quality this year.

A jury of 12 (which includes Gerald Forty of the British Council) collects information from 150 correspondants, who provide documentation of about 750 artists and groups in all countries – though as Georges Boudaille says in his introduction, the Biennale is weak on Latin America, Africa and India, whose artists frequently work in national or traditional styles. The limiting age so far has always been 35, but the suggestion is that this restriction will be removed next time in 1977 – since *avant-garde* significance does not always disappear before this age!

In the first Biennale in 1959, Anthony Caro was the British star turn; later Hockney, Jones, Caulfield and Riley achieved international recognition here. Last time, in 1973, the jury selected among 98 artists, five from Britain: Stephen Buckley, John Cob, John Davies, Tam McPhail and Carl Plackman, with a further 11 in the photographic documentation section, six in the film section, and the Keith Tippett trio in the jazz section. This year, among 123 artists invited, including a record 25 women participants, there are 13 from Britain: Michael Craig-Martin, John Stezacker, Conrad Atkinson, Darcy Lange, Ronald Michaelson, David Dye, Barry Flanagan, Nigel Hall, Jeff Lowe, Bob Evans, Tom Mapston, the COUM group and Anthony McCall.

Last time, most of the exhibitors were in the dark warren of spaces in the east wing of the Musée, and only a few across the way in the west wing along with the permanent collection, where the light is brighter. This time, there are fewer on the dark side and more – mostly the British exhibitors – interpolated in the crisp white spaces of the bright side; while this year the Musée Galliera across the road plays host to the peasant artists of Houhsien in China.

You'll make some allowances for my nationalist bias when I say that the British artists make a considerable impact this year, not only in

space acquired, but also in professionalism of presentation and mental impact. Michael Craig-Martin's claim to have turned a glass of water into an oak tree in the mind, John Stezacker's questioning of word, concept and image, Conrad Atkinson's exhibit on the theme of hunger, Darcy Lange's photographic studies of workers in mass industry and Ronald Michaelson's investigations into the psychic elements of everyday life and its meetings. The discipline and visual elegance of the oriental contributors, Chinese, Japanese and Korean, stands out throughout; German humour missing this year; two of the Athena shops' magic realists, Bill Martin and Gage Taylor, are here; the Swede, Marie-Louise de Geer Bergenstrahle, gives TV culture a real kick in the teeth; the Grup de Treball were invited but didn't show. There is, refreshingly, no unfairly dominating trend; what emerges overall is the question, put and answered in many ways, of the artist's elusive place – which must be found – in a fragmented society.

Many of the exhibits attempt to answer this question from first principles – 'starting from where you are'. Thus the title 'art' is often inappropriate, and even 'communication' is hardly the word either. I would suggest 'focusing of consciousness'. The sense is of the artist taking stock of his natural resources which may be his body (Alan Sonfist, 'My body is my museum'); Marina Abramovic (also in the Yugoslav team at Demarco's in Edinburgh) films her spontaneous reactions to a schizophrenia pill. The artist acquires a social existence – Anna Oppermann builds up an environment of trivial fond records to show this. He communicates the uncertainty of his role as an artist (John Armleder). He has however an eye, which finds strangeness, life, significance in everything he sees (David Dye). He offers the honesty of living out his life-style in front of you (Hikosaka, his studio transported to Paris from Tokyo). He ritualises his life, to give detachment (Takubo). He re-arranges life and his environment just a little, to bring both together again (Lee Kang-So). He seeks his own history (John Fernie). The sense of the isolated search, and the enormous resultant demands on the spectator to 'reach' the artist, make this an impossible exhibition to review in depth, but important to experience; one is left eagerly awaiting the next chapter in the search.

Michael Shepherd

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John Panting



The Serpentine Gallery has started to establish for itself a memorial exhibition tradition. Not so long ago there was the George Fullard show. Jeremy

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Moon's is to come, and this month **John Panting's**; all artists who have died quite recently, sadly young. The place is appropriate: not too small and insignificant, not too imposing and institutionalised. This means it suits those whose working life failed to run much beyond the promising stages.

John Panting never attained the star or star-gazer status of some of his contemporaries who went to St Martin's School of Art in the days when Caro ruled. Instead Panting, who was New Zealand born and went to the Royal College of Art, hit upon an idiom that, in the often overheated politics of modern sculpture, came to look like a rather cool, elegant rejoinder to the heavy mentality of those in the Caro wake. Of course, it was not quite as simple and cut and thrust as that. Nevertheless, Panting and Nigel Hall (who was with him at the RCA) made a distinctive impression as minimalists with a difference, using metal tubing for its pliable, wand qualities. They both made a graceful entry to the show *British Sculptors '73* held at Burlington House, being among the few who refrained from cramming their allotted space. Panting especially capitalised on restraint, showing two outline rectangles sprung out of shape, corners raised from the floor as though ready for the off. For an exhibition at Felicity Samuels' gallery a few months later he produced taller, more complicated pieces, but these were mere diagrams compared to the last work.

A few examples of what turned out to be his final developments are included in the Serpentine show. They are rough and craggy, constructed rather than composed, bulky as opposed to linear. They are tantalising objects because they show Panting casting around for fresh means. They emphasise our loss because, at the age of 34, Panting was only beginning.

He was, come to think of it, still young enough to qualify as an entrant to the **Biennale de Paris**, which at a time of recession and second thoughts, is one of the few surviving contemporary art expos. It opens on September 19 and runs until November 2 at the Musée d'Art Modernes and the Musée Galliera. The emphasis being on youthful innovation, it is determinedly up to the minute. Though to judge from the lists of the exhibitors, there is to be more modernism on show than newness proper. Those chosen for this, the 9th Biennale, tend towards the systematical-conceptual with political and studiously casual trimmings. It is, in other words, a demonstration of jury taste and shrewd guesswork rather than a cross-section of all that is going on. But, whatever the shortcomings, the whole lot is bound to be a good bundle of current tendencies. As always in these bonanzas, the one-off, impresario-minded artists will have the edge over the quieter, more self-contained souls. Take that into account and the Biennale is an ideal opportunity for a quick survey of the striving art scene and a good excuse for a spell in autumn Paris.

DON'T MISS . . . Continuing: *Palladio and the Georgian Playhouse* at the Hayward • Opening: *The World of Franklin and Jefferson* at the British Museum, the second stage in the Bicentennial celebrations over here, before the whole junket goes into orbit next year • *Gan Van Elk* at Nigel Greenwood: Van Elk is the dandiest of Dutch photo-conceptualists and his recent products centre on the idea of retouching photographs of painting processes, evidence not so much of vaunting as of circling ambitions • At *Angela Flowers*, paintings by *Derek Hirst* • At the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, recent paintings by *Stephen Buckley* • At the Tate, *Richard Smith* until September 28.