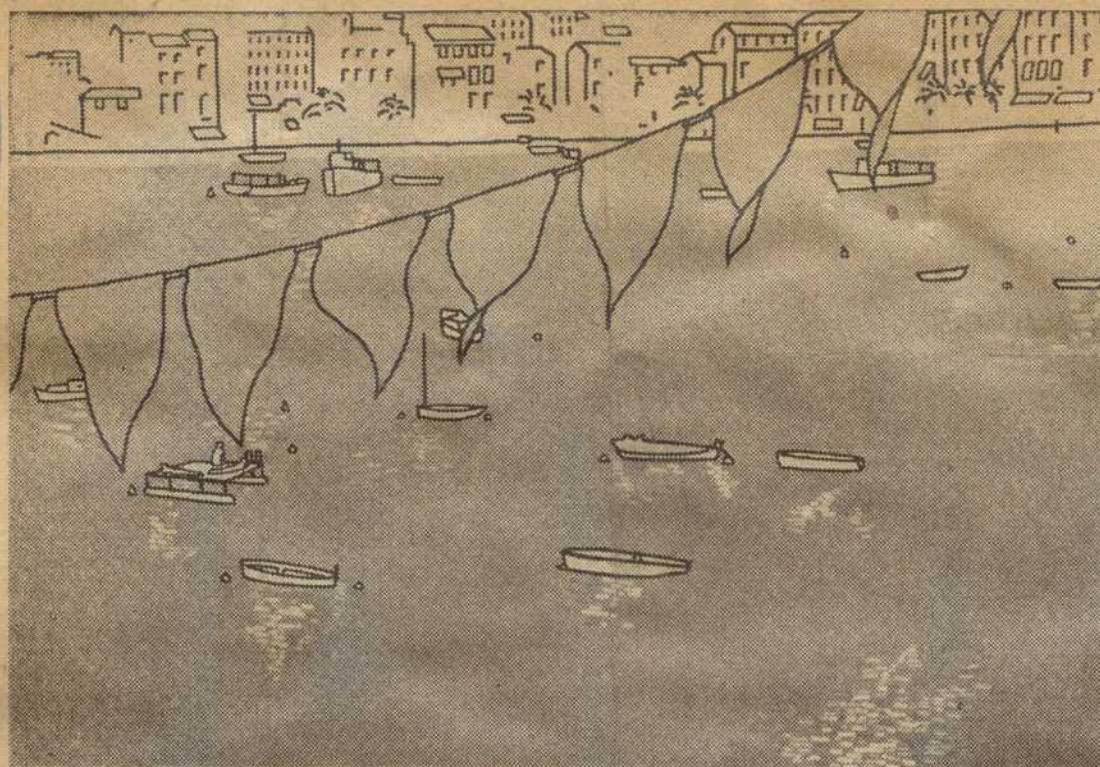


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AT THE BIENNALE—Patrick Caulfield's "View of the Bay."

Young Artists of Paris Biennale Suffer in Comparison With 1963's

By John Ashbery

PARIS, Oct. 4.—The fourth Paris Biennale, consisting of work by young artists from 54 different countries, has opened at the Musée d'Art Moderne. It will be on until Nov. 3, daily except Tuesdays, from noon to 11 p.m.

After the lively 1963 Biennale, the present one is a disappointment. In fact it is possibly the weakest of the four. In so large and geographically varied an exhibition there is always bound to be unevenness, but the 1965 Biennale is a curious melange of apathy and pointless violence. In the words of William Butler Yeats: "The best lack all conviction; the worst are full of a passionate intensity."

Just as the inhabitants of the city of Alphaville in Jean-Luc Godard's film are incapable of understanding the word "love," which has been replaced by the word "voluptuousness" in the official dictionary, so the young artists of the Biennale (with a handful of exceptions) seem incapable of grasping the idea of art. And in fact, hasn't this word too been struck out of the dictionary, to be replaced by new terms like Pop Art, Op Art, Kinetic Art, and so on?

Since these terms go in and out of fashion faster than discotheques, there seems little point in trying to keep up with them. This is apparently the feeling of the Biennale artists, who make half-hearted attempts to follow one fad or another, not getting too involved in case they have to "change over" tomorrow.

Just an Artist

There are a few artists in the show who have the courage to be themselves, regardless of labels, even when the labels happen to

fit. England's Bridget Riley is one of the few Op artists who can be taken seriously, precisely because she is not an Op artist at all but just an artist. Her paintings are patterns of undulating black lines on a white background—hard to look at and harder to discuss, but among the rare works in the Biennale to challenge the imagination.

Patrick Caulfield, also English, might be labeled Pop for easy reference purposes, but in fact he has preoccupations of his own. His flattened, conventionalized view of a Mediterranean port in three colors has an icy rigor that for once acts as a tonic to the senses.

Although the British delegation is generally the most interesting, it is still a letdown after that of 1963, which introduced to Paris such lively talents as William Tucker, Philip King, David Hockney, Peter Blake and Derek Boshier. Most of this year's artists seem content merely to follow the 1963 lead.

The sculptures of Tim Scott, Isaac Witkin and Derrick Woodham repeat the pastel-painted, bulging volumes of Tucker and King without adding anything to them. Antony Donaldson's Pop pinups have already been seen in the work of Peter Blake and Allan Jones, while Paul Huxley's hard-edge abstractions look as if they were waiting to be made up into Mary Quant dresses.

Anne Madden, of Ireland, is among the very few original artists in the Biennale. In her abstractions, rough-hewn white lozenges appear like sails on a black or dark blue background, with a strange urgency. Another individualist is Japan's Kazuo Yuhara, whose sculptures are merely square or oblong blocks of aluminum some-

times with a mirror attached. That is about as enigmatic as you can get, and in the context of the Biennale it's something.

Dismaying Uniformity

The French section is a mess. I am sick of people who smugly declare that the Ecole de Paris is dead, but a visitor who judged it on the basis of this exhibition could come to no other conclusion. When the artists are not reminding us of the horrors of war, as if we were in danger of forgetting them, they dish out the usual Pop, Op or Abstract Expressionist clichés of the past few years with dismaying uniformity.

In fact, there are a lot of talented young painters and sculptors in Paris whose work is well known to the Biennale jury. A number of them are included in an interesting show called "Narrative Figuration" now on at the Galerie Creuze, 12 Rue Beauboulevard, which will be reviewed later. Together with the painters in the 35-50 age group in the current "Promesses Tenues" show at the Musée Galliera, they give a much more encouraging account of the Paris scene than the Biennale, which was probably dominated by politics as these affairs usually are.

In case you are wondering why I haven't mentioned the American participation in the Biennale, it's because there isn't any. And why? Because, dear reader, our government decided it didn't have the money to sponsor any such participation. Guatemala, Bulgaria, Pakistan, Madagascar and even Vietnam managed to scrape up enough funds to send exhibits, but not the United States, even though President Johnson signed a \$60 million aid to the arts bill only last week.

Considering the generally low quality of the Biennale, it may be just as well that we're out of it. Still, it is drawing large crowds, and a well-chosen American group could have been a focal point and proved that we're not the crass materialists that everybody says. But in refusing to back U.S. participation in the Biennale the State Department has suggested gain that we are materialists after all.

The Biennale program also includes concerts, film showings, lectures, poetry readings and performances of plays. Full details of these can be had in the Biennale alendar, obtainable at the secretariat just inside the museum entrance (11 Ave. President-Wilson).