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ART

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International Paris

THE 13th Paris Biennale announced itself this year as the *Nouvelle Biennale de Paris*; it has changed its venue and its intentions, and aims to be even more of an international event than before.

The previous sequence, originally entitled the "Biennale des Jeunes," performed a useful and informative function, and a unique one. More countries in the world than appear, for instance, at the Venice Biennale, showed artists under 35; selection by a combination of national commissioners and independent correspondents.

But now Paris is in the process of creating a lavish new arts complex on the site of the old cattle-market near the Porte de Pantin metro: called the Parc de la Villette. Theatre-goers will know it already as the venue for *Théâtre Present*. A huge budget of close on a million pounds has gone to turning the old "Halle aux Boeufs" into a vast exhibition space which enables large works to be placed in the centre nave, and also to be seen from the balconies of the first-floor galleries around it.

And—just at the wrong time, some would say, when it is more needed in its old form than ever—the new Biennale management has decided to

turn it into another international manifestation of the "Trans-avant-garde," as this has been named by Achille Bonito Oliva: the contemporary artists who have, by one means or another, won credibility across the world as manifesting in their way the new spirit of art which knows no frontiers.

This is breeding a new species of "international show champion" artists—who appear at one such show after another, pulling off *tours-de-force* and *coups d'art* of ever more spectacular nature. Public commissions are all too rare, and these shows offer the rare big opportunity to work big in a big space for a large public.

The big numbers this time are a marvellous new work by the Swiss, Tinguely, where the individual components of a racing car are in a sort of frozen explosion in space, while projectors provide the manic background of pit-stops; a vast photo-mural by our Gilbert and George, "Death After Life," where the lifeless poses work against a real feeling for contemporary frustrations; two huge walls in an artificial corridor where the American, Keith Haring, reduces his own graffiti style into wallpaper pattern; another vast wall where the German, Baselitz, has a score of his upside-down

paintings hung in neat rectangular block of rust, black and white paint; and a *tour-de-force* by the British sculptor Bill Woodrow, where two Renault car bodies hung on the wall serve as recycling material for cut and welded objects including two big cuckoo clocks, an aerial missile and a teapot.

Forceful German art, fanciful Italian art, and American "comix" art are much in evidence, along with their various international followers. Britain has had eight artists selected; besides the two mentioned, there are Richard Deacon, David Hockney, Christopher Le Brun, Julian Opie, Paula Rego, and Boyd Webb. And the partly British resident Roberto Matta has one of the most impressive large works in the show.

But despite all the current promotion of new vigour, new spirit and new imagery in contemporary art, much of the work seems to express a general view of mankind (or the artist) suppressed under a despairing, politically imposed, narrow-minded, romantic doom. It makes Hockney seem like an affirmation of life; and the good-natured self-portraits of Holger Bunk—not unlike the British artist John Wonnacott's—like some Renaissance statement of belief in humanity's importance. The Biennale continues to May 20.