

Extract from

# THE TABLET

LONDON

25 NOV 1967

Date

Grande-Bretagne

## THIS WEEK IN THE ARTS

### 5700 Contemporary Religious Art in Paris

LAST WEEK, the Museum of Modern Art in Paris was in its usual chaos. The exhibitors of the *Salon d'Art Sacré et d'Expression Spirituelle* had brought their works for hanging on the same day that the *Biennale des Jeunes* was being taken down. Both exhibitions are strictly contemporary; but there wasn't the least trouble in telling which work belonged to which show.

"How is it," asked one critic, "that all these young Biennale artists, all making their highly-original experiments, produce work of such sameness?" "It's the lack of content," was the other critic's answer. "What you get out is what they've put in, and noughts are all alike." No such criticism could be made of the *Art Sacré Salon*, formally opened on November 17th. Variety is its most striking feature, and the visitor is at once aware that each artist is making a highly personal and fervent statement.

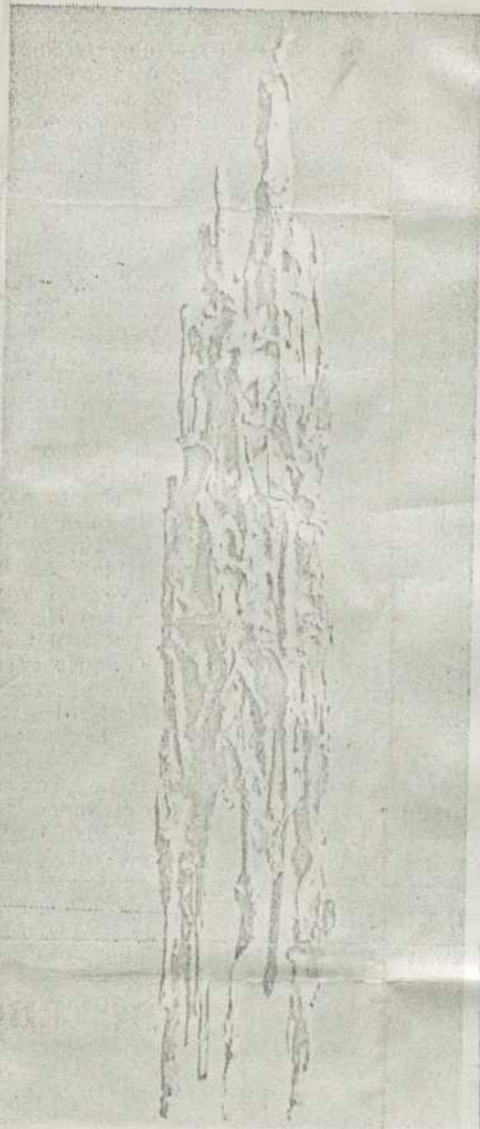
Outstanding works are two great collages, one made of large slates and stones, "The Strait Gate," by Odette Bourderie, the other, "Evolution," painted by Raoul Michau. Also a sheet-aluminium triptych by Leunens; mystical engravings by Filiberti and Robert Cami, and abstract paintings by Nadia Moutier and (in heavy relief) by Xavier Morvan. This gives some idea of the wide range.

There are 360 works on view, and the special features of the show this year are the Argentine, Polish and British sections (in that order, because of the amount of funds each was prepared to allot). It was a surprise to many people to see an official Polish exhibit, the more so because it includes drawings of a number of modern churches built since 1950. But the art is less sophisticated than that shown by Polish émigré artists Kawalec and Bohusz in the same Salon, two years ago.

The Argentine section succeeds in being typically South American, yet at the same time contemporary in techniques. The surprise, here, is that the accent has been placed on the "God of Wrath" of the Old Testament. A powerful striding figure of the prophet Elijah, in iron and zinc, by Juan Carlos Labourdette dominates the section, and a truly terrifying oil-painting by Laura Mulhall Gironde, taking a text from the psalms, shows the wicked being watched in their torment by seven pairs of Eyes of God.

After this, the British section, next door, seems characteristically restrained. A feature has been made of colour-photographs of the new Catholic Cathedral in Liverpool, especially the glass of the great lantern-tower by John Piper and Patrick Reyntiens, and William Mitchell's fibreglass doors. The most striking item in the section is a ten-feet-high bronze sculpture, "Aspiration" by Helen Ashbee, illustrated here. Remarkably, this appears almost weightless, in spite of its size. Other exhibits are Dennis Hawkins's "Trinity Symbols," Phillida Nicholson's tapestries and, in the stained glass room, Rosemary Rutherford's "Creation" series, and a model of Philip Brown's huge window which makes up the entire West Wall of St. Patrick's, Hayling Island. Brown's unusual use of sweeping cross-rhythms creates an effect of infinite space.

The stained glass room is the most in-



'Aspiration' by Helen Ashbee

teresting part of the Salon to visitors, because it is utterly unlike mediæval or Victorian glass. Designs are abstract, colours subtle, and much use is made of very thick slab glass and concrete, with a variety of techniques. For a metallic church, Jacques Le Chevallier uses an ultra-modern design, the panes invisibly joined with resin. Janie Pichard surprises with a dark window traced with lines of light. Job Guevel's unusual textures create an atmosphere of mystery; a great fragment from an entire wall of slab glass and concrete by Theo Kerg achieves grandeur.

The Architecture Section reflects the two opposite reactions of church-builders today, faced with a doubting world. One movement — typified by Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral and Le Donné's "Signal" at Mulhouse, with its tall tapered concrete tower — makes an affirmation of faith. The other, exemplified in Szekely's *Cité Spirituelle pour Reims*, goes to ground, with a feeling, perhaps, for the Catacombs where it all began. A clay model is shown of this extraordinary project, nick-named "The fall-out shelter." A drawing of the Ecumenical Church at Chamrousse (site of the Olympic Games) comes into the Catacombs class, too, as it is apparently "landscaped" into a hill.

This is the seventeenth exhibition of Contemporary Religious Art organised by Joseph Pichard, and it's generally agreed to be the best.

SUSAN GLYN