

ARGUS DE LA PRESSE
21, BOULEVARD MONTMARTRE

75002 PARIS
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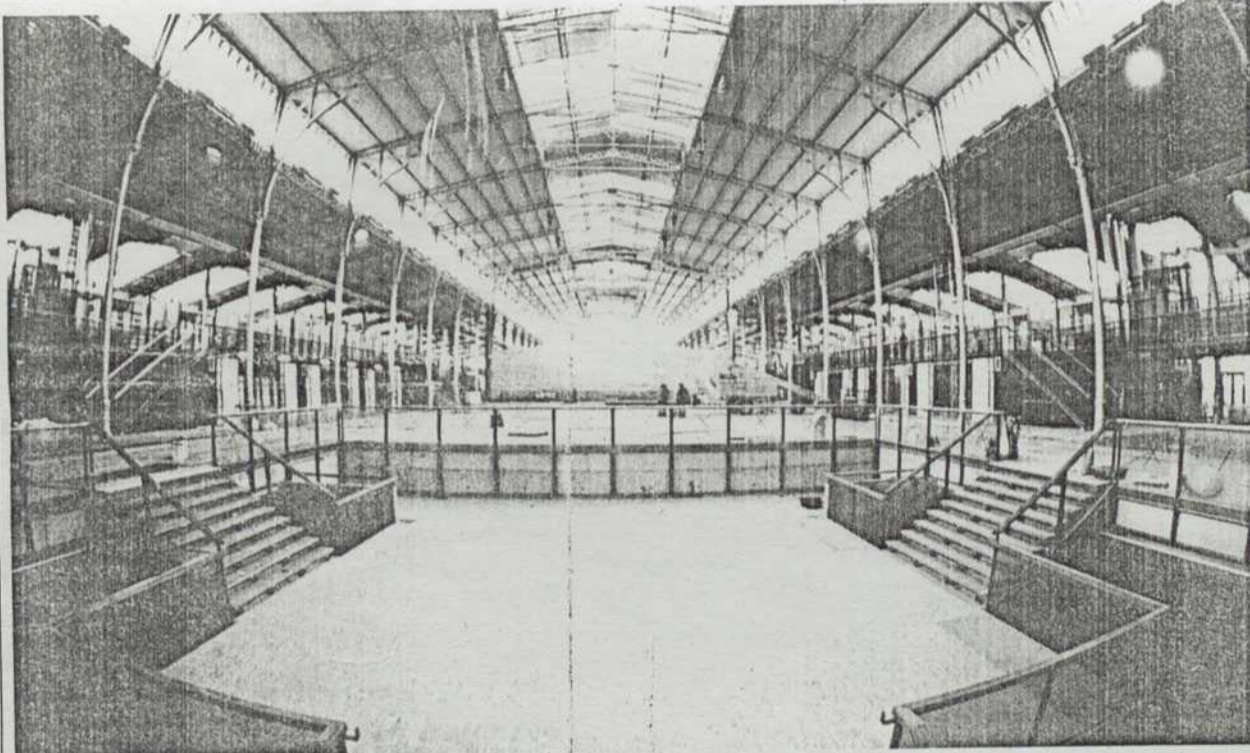
Extract from:
ART LINE,
London.

-- MAY 1985

PARIS

Art Line's French editor, the
1985 Paris Biennale and
another view...

Andre Leclerc.



TENSION RAN on the high wire at the opening of the 1985 Paris Biennale: some painting still unhung, others anonymous and, despite the presence of a small army of guards, a work by Michaux was successfully removed (no doubt an astute collector, this being the only dead artist figuring at the Biennale). Rivalries and chauvinistic skirmishes were fought out on this spacious battle-field while Achille Bonito Oliva scurried around nervously, rallying his trans-avantgarde troops and Parisian dealer, Daniel Templon looked smug — he could afford to be with 14 of his artists participating out of a total of 120. Daniel Buren's candy-striped tent rising out of the central aisle was often mistaken for the ephemeral bar and Keith Haring, originally destined to apply a bit of Manhattan graffiti to the nearby metro station, Porte de Pantin, eventually found himself slaving over the high walls of the stairs leaving below to the (temporarily non-existent) bar.

BIENNALE

A budget of 10 million francs (approximately £1 million) led to this Art-spectacular: the

1867 abattoirs situated at one of the northern gates of Paris, part of the new culture park of La Villette, have now been transformed to supposedly vie with other major international Art gatherings such as at Kassel and Venice. This upgrading of the Paris Biennale (founded in 1959) also gives French artists a sorely needed airing in a more prestigious environment and context than was previously the case. While the recently risen young star, Robert Combas, was chosen to illustrate catalogue and poster in his neo-Californian-flowerpowerist style, some of the older generation kept the Gallic numbers up: Jean Hélion, over 80 and still producing some fine paintings was a more judicious choice than Bettencourt, knocking 70, who could have been overlooked.

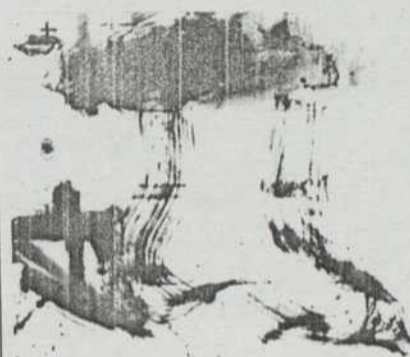
Of the new generation of French artists three stood out: Garouste, now known for his richly painted neo-classical themes; Patrice Giorda whose balanced and luminous interior scenes appear delusively simple and Jean-Charles Blais whose woodcutters, familiarly rounded, cross a brilliant Gauloise blue multiple-layered and ripped

paper. Their destination could be Cucchi's adjacent work, thematically ready for the bonfire with its singed logs curving out of a vertical support.

CHA CHA CHAA

The British contingent included Gilbert & George, Hockney, Morley and the Lisson Gallery. Special — Woodrow, Kapoor, Deacon and Opie — while Paula Rego and Christopher Le Brun were also present: the latter's atmospheric white steeds rode particularly high on the balcony space.

Inevitably, with the presence of Bonito Oliva on the selection committee (together with Georges Boudaille, Cassiot-Talabot, Kasper König and Alanna Heiss) the Italians were well represented, though numerically running pretty even with the Germans and Americans. Along with the three 'C's', Schifano, Paladino (with a superb mosaic panel), Longobardi, Paladino and Pizzi Cannella all kept the Transavanguardia flag aloft leaving conceptual work to Mario Merz and Paolini. The German neo-Expressionists, some of whom were



Tapiès.

series of 18 works forming a major focal-point; Kiefer's echoing architectures were forcefully present, and Polka surpassed himself in polka-dots.

From the States, as expected, Schnabel, Salle, Haring and Basquiat, amongst others, with from the older generations Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Stella and, of most contemporary interest, Leon Golub. This breaking away from the former Paris Biennale formula of restricting participants to the under 35 age group has meant that precursors to current movements can be shown — an idea explored more successfully at the Venice Biennale last year in their *Pittura Colta* section. The Paris version remains timid: relevance can be found in Tapiès, Czapski and Golub but it is isolated and understated and at the same time precious space which could otherwise have been devoted to younger discoveries (and who is this Stupica, born in 1913 in Drazgos?). In the same way the attempt to pay homage to Latin-American Art falls flat on its face with a total of nine artists from this vast continent evenly scattered, many of them resident in France thus undergoing local influences.

And so the tour comes to an end with as many oversights as exist in the Biennale itself. Limitations of space play their part, and perhaps one of the most positive factors was that each artist was able to show two or three works. It remains to be seen whether by the closing date (May 21st) the expected 200,000 visitors will have made the trek to the Villette and whether, with the next Biennale, the onslaught of figurative work will be attenuated.

Fiona Dunlop

Top: The old slaughter house.

Below: Jean Charles Blais 'sans tutre 1984.

noticeably missing (Fetting? Salome? Castelli?), were often converted to sculpture as in the case of Penck, Immendorff and Lupertz. A prolific Baselitz produced a

PS. The Biennale also contains sections devoted to Sound (housed in metal containers at the entrance) and Architecture while occasional concerts, video and theatre have added to the ambience.

