

VISIONS

The Biennale Takes A Backward Glance To Broaden Its View Of Art

Founded in 1959 as a showcase for young artists but soon eclipsed by its rivals in other major cities, the Paris Biennale boosts itself into world prominence with a new home and a new lease on life

by ANN CREMIN

THE MOST important event on the contemporary French art scene is the Biennale de Paris, being held this year in the newly opened Grand Halle at Parc de La Villette. The exhibition space, recently inaugurated by President François Mitterrand is a splendid example of 19th-century architecture, well restored by architects Bernard Reichen and Philippe Robert. In traditional industrial architectural style, the hall, measuring 21,000 square meters by 19 meters high, includes metal arcades, catwalks and an impressive glass roof.

The Biennale de Paris was founded in 1959 specifically for younger artists, and indeed until now has shown only artists under 35 years-old. Georges Boudaille, president of the Biennale for the last 15 years, has decided to rival Venice and São Paulo by showing a much wider selection of artists. It is hoped that Paris will carry the same clout as Documenta in Kassel, West Germany, which has for the last few years been the most trend-setting of the international exhibitions. Judging by the selection of American, European and South American artists at the Biennale, Boudaille's international committee has so far succeeded in bolstering the show into world prominence. The committee has also chosen to show the precursors of current trends so that one can better follow the evolution of certain tendencies.

Thus the newest figurative movements are prefaced by the works of such elders as Jean Hélion, Roberto Matta and Leon Golub. The "Art of the Eighties" is backed up by a strong showing of artists from the Sixties and Seventies, from both the conceptual and *art pauvre* movements (a more specifically Italian movement). Among the latter are works by Michelangelo Pistoletto and Mario Merz, specially commissioned for this space. All the big names are there, the Italians Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, the new German expressionists including Anselm Kiefer, one of the most powerful of the young generation, and the German Jörg Immendorf whose monumental bronze sculpture *The Brandenburg Gate* symbolizes the splitting in two of Berlin.

Other specially commissioned works are the painting of the Porte de Pantin metro station by Kieth Haring, star of the American graffiti scene. French artist Daniel Buren has created one of his 12-foot-high famous striped canvas tents in the shape of an inverted pyramid. His work is particularly striking in unexpected places, where he wittily transforms the existing architecture into his own brand of art.

The Biennale also sponsors musical happenings that combine sight and sound, with programs featuring John Cage, Laurie Anderson and Takis. Not content with all this, the new-style Biennale also offers concerts, video films and a grand ball on April 19 with a wide va-

riety of music (Latino, Funk, Oriental and Musette). In other words, the festival is living up to its avowed ambition to make the space accessible to as many people as possible, encompassing every form of art, to create a kind of "permanent feast."

■ Biennale de Paris, Grande Halle de la Vil-

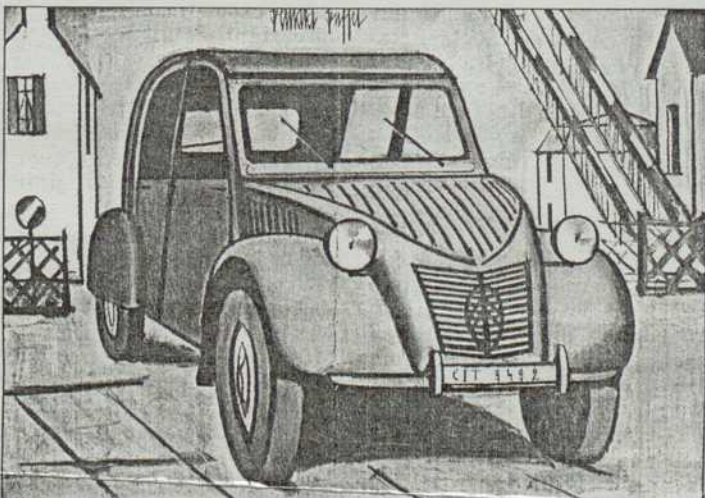


Grffiti artist Jean-Michel Basquiat's Zydeco. M^e Porte de Pantin. Weekdays, 12h-20h, Sat. and Sun., 10h-20h. Closed Mondays. March 21-May 21.

WHILE THE BIENNALE focuses attention on art's fast track, several galleries are putting on individual shows for artists taking part in the jamboree.

The Galerie de France has four new sculptures by the Italian Michelangelo Pistoletto who has not had a solo show in Paris for over ten years. People who remember him as a committed member of the *arte povera* movement, showing splintered mirrors, may be surprised to see his newest "baroque" works. Made of marble and polyurethane and entitled *The Four Seasons*, the pieces were specifically designed for the space. Upstairs are three older pieces that enable one to follow this artist's progression. ■ Galerie de France: 50-52, rue de la Verrière, 75004. Tel: 274.38.00. M^e Hôtel-de-Ville. 12h-19h. Closed Mon. March 14-Apr. 30.

LEON GOLUB, CHICAGO- born artist, now in his sixties, has been painting politically committed works since the Fifties. But it is only in the last few years that his work has been perceived as seminal for an entire generation of artists. While the Biennale will feature four of his large scale works, the Darthea Speyer gallery is showing drawings by the artist. His work is impressive and disturbing, reflecting a reality we would often sooner ignore than confront. ■ Galerie Darthea Speyer: 6, rue Jacques-



Car lovers are in for a treat with the release of Buffet's L'Automobile (Editions Michèle Trinckvel).

Callot, 75006. Tel: 354.78.41. M^e Saint Germain-des-Prés. 14h30-19h. Closed Mondays. March 14-Apr. 20.

ANOTHER BIENNALE ARTIST exhibiting his recent work in a gallery is Jan Voss. German-born, he has lived in France for more than half his life and has just completed an eight-meter-long painting for La Villette. On show in the Galerie Adrien Maeght are his paintings on paper, cut out and crumpled, and then pasted on canvas, creating a sense of life and joyousness.

■ Galerie Adrien Maeght: 46, rue du Bac, 75006. Tel: 222.12.59. M^e rue du Bac. Open from 10h-13h, 14h-18h30. Closed Mon. March 15-Apr. 20.

ALSO GERMAN, BUT VERY different in intent and manner is Wolfgang Gäfgen, who is showing recent large scale drawings at Baudoin Lebon's new gallery. Gäfgen's work is striking, full of a brooding intensity of feeling allied to a free and sure technique. The drawings are color washed to emphasize the sense of desolation. A brilliant draughtsman, Gäfgen has such control over his medium that he can fill an enormous space with drawings which have the presence of paintings.

■ Galerie Baudoin Lebon: 34, rue des Archives, 75004. Tel: 272.09.10. M^e Hôtel-de-Ville. Open from 10h-13h, from 14h30-19h. Closed Mon. March 16-Apr. 20.

AN IMPORTANT BOOK FOR anyone concerned with the philosophy of art has recently been published. In *Les Horizons du Possible* (Editions du Felin, 1984, 130 F), American writer and art historian Michael Gibson has woven together a series of interviews with artists, poets, philosophers and assorted friends that he originally did for the radio station *France Culture*. A wide-ranging work, the book touches on diverse forms of creativity and the role of great myths in the history of humankind.

MEANWHILE, AUTOMOBILE lovers will welcome the release of *L'Automobile*, by Bernard Buffet (Editions Michèle Trinckvel 1985, 100F). The volume is an elegantly presented retrospective of the author's 30 oil drawings of automobile models which have marked the scene between 1925 and 1980. Coinciding with its publication, the Galerie Maurice Garnier is hosting Buffet's 36th consecutive exhibit at 6, avenue Matignon, until March 30.