

Festival of Contemporary Arts at Cornell

Willard Straight Hall Memorial Room | Cornell University

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Art

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Paintings and sculpture by seven representative American artists and 16 Ithaca artists, plans and sketches of contemporary architecture and landscape architecture, dance photographs, ceramics, and textiles have been placed on exhibition in the Memorial Room of Willard Straight Hall as part of Cornell's second Festival of Contemporary American Arts. The show will be on view through Sunday, June 2.

The exhibition is a generous one. It gives a comprehensive view of modern graphic and plastic arts and decoration, effectively integrated with the dramatic and musical offerings of the festival.

The 22 paintings by contemporary American artists have been carefully selected to demonstrate varied formal aspects of art today. Running nimbly up and down the esthetic scale from abstract to representational painting, these seven modern artists give in general an impression of extreme virtuosity rather than profundity or depth of feeling.

Most of these painters are men in their 40s or 50s, strongly influenced by European art movements of the last generation, but often using American themes as a springboard. The casual observer, seeking the comfortably familiar, will doubtless prefer the objective statements of Joe Jones or the romantic, moody land and seascapes of William Thon to the surrealism of Max Ernst, the racked expressionism of Abraham Rattner, the fantasist inventions of Julio de Diego, the geometric forms of Niles Spencer, or the abstractions of Louis Schanker.

Two of these painters are American only by adoption. Diego is a Spaniard, now much influenced by primitive art and the Mexican images he brought back from a recent trip to the south. His crayon drawings and temperas are subtle in harmony, often glowing and sometimes sombre in color. Max Ernst, who has lived in this country since 1941, was an early surrealist and pioneer of the 1910 Cologne dadaist group. His collage, "Butterflies," and the dream symbolism of "Nymph Echo" are actually representative of an earlier phase of modern art which has left its mark on many later painters and on advertising art and

Heavily pigmented, sometimes overwrought, harsh in color yet intense in feeling, the paintings of Rattner are often likened to the work of Rouault, though they have little of the French master's sensuous beauty of color. At the opposite pole from these febrile paintings are the cool, low-keyed patterns of Louis Schanker, so pleasing to the eye in their built-up tempera textures. Where Rattner, alone among the artists in this group is concerned with social expression, Schanker's purpose seems to be purely decorative.

The Ithaca artists show almost as wide a range of style as their national contemporaries. J. M. Hanson's firm, precise design stems from the French abstractionists, while Norman Daly's abstract composition draws on American Indian motifs for its inspiration. James Owen Mahoney's "Augury" wittily combines the real and painted object in the manner of the earlier surrealists.

John Hartell's "King and Queen," an evocative tableau of childhood, Virginia True's fresh, pleasantly decorative "Morning," and Kenneth Washburn's watercolor, "In the Midst of Life," represent other trends. Visitors to the exhibition will recognize the work of new and old friends in the paintings of W. C. Baker, Olaf Brauner, Adelaide E. Briggs, Clara Garrett, Marian Goodier, Alison Mason Kingsbury, Dorothy Marcuse, Christian Midjo, Walter King Stone, and the wood sculpture of Elfriede Abbe.

Architectural models, plans, sketches and photographs have been chosen to show current directions in house design and plot planning. George Fred Keck's model of a "solar" house is oriented to the south, its glass wall capturing the winter sun, while its wide overhang affords coolness in the summer. Landscape designs of Church, Eckbo, and Kiley are planned for outdoor living.

Modern Ithaca houses shown in the exhibition compare favorably with the best domestic architecture of today. The clean interior lines of the home of E. A. Miller, designed by Donald V. Moore, and the pleasing use of natural woods in the home designed by Thomas J. Baird are well suited to local sites on lake and hill.

New materials and methods in textiles and ceramics appear in the work of Maija Grotell, Robert D. Sailors, Marianne Strenge, Edna Vogel, Lydia Winston, and Nancy Leitch. Rugs and hangings in imaginative patterns of varied textures are made of jute, glass and metal as well as more conventional fabrics.

Action photographs of the Cornell Dance Club by Marion E. Wesp serve to illustrate both camera techniques and the form and movement of the dance.

The exhibition has been admirably arranged and hung by Thomas J. Baird, Norman D. Daly, and Virginia True. The catalog was designed by Kenneth Washburn.

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