

DMAC Exhibitions 1-1-1-1

Through unusual scheduling, the Des Moines Art Center was enabled this past summer to have in four successive exhibitions the work of three painters and a sculptor who since early in this century have been identified as leaders of various modern art movements. Few museums of whatever size can boast of having such an array in the same space of time. This is tantamount to having personal appearances at the local theater by Marilyn Monroe, Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren and Kim Novak on four successive evenings.

Though nominally American, all four artists are internationally celebrated. Only one, Stuart Davis, can be entirely claimed by the United States, and even he is not without debt to Paris. Of the others, German-born Hans Hofmann studied in Germany and Paris and had an established reputation as a teacher in Munich before settling in the United States in the ~~late~~ early 'Thirties; American-born Lyonel Feininger left New York at the age of 16 to study music in Germany and stayed to become an outstanding painter and a leader of the Bauhaus school, returning only when the activities of Adolf Hitler became too repugnant; Russian-born Jacques Lipchitz was an important sculptor in Paris when it was still the unchallenged art capital of the world.

With the exception of Feininger, who died last year, all continue to work with undiminished vigor and are still in the forefront of the art world though their names were something to conjure with a quarter of a century ago. In this age of fleeting fame, such durability speaks eloquently for their individual talents.

The exhibitions of the paintings of Stuart Davis and Hans Hofmann were large, ~~xxx~~ almost comprehensive retrospectives; the other two shows were smaller and limited in one way or another. In weighing all four exhibitions, the two smaller seemed more satisfying if less spectacular.

The more than fifty large paintings comprising the Stuart Davis show concentrated on work since the mid-Forties, a period in which it is claimed

by Dr. H. H. Arnason, Director of the Walker Art Center which organized the exhibition, that Stuart Davis has come to full maturity as an artist. But the comprehensive exhibition of his work tracing the almost organic evolution of a fine painter shown by the Museum of Modern Art in 1945 with work dating back to 1912 revealed that maturity had been achieved at least by the late 'Twenties; the fact that the paintings from the earlier show which are included in the recent exhibition are among the outstanding canvases gives the lie to the suspicion that time has clouded judgment. Indeed, Mr. Davis, who for years was an avowed realist shunning the label "abstract", seemingly has not only become resigned to having his work "typecast as abstract" but has whole-heartedly embraced the game as well as the name with the result that many of his later works lean heavily on the decorative rather than the formal. Some of the late paintings do not seem the fulfillment of maturity nearly as much as they seem the work of a man in search of the fountain of youth trying to remain au courant.

Mr. Davis has for many years been a fan of authentic jazz, and he has attempted in his paintings to capture the same tempo; however, his compositions have a preciseness inconsistent with the spontaneity of jazz, and his later canvases have a tortured paint surface inconsistent with both the meticulous composition and the jazz spirit.

Mr. Hofmann in his recent cacaphonic paintings is much closer to some aspects of the jazz idiom, though he does not indicate that it has ever been his intent. We have long claimed that whatever else might be said of Hofmann, at least he is an original talent — an innovator. As the elder statesman among the abstract expressionists, he is the spiritual leader of the most vocal and dominant group of exhibiting artists of this decade. And yet, his large show indicates that his role of innovator is fairly new one. With the exception of a self-portrait painted in 1902, the fifty king-size paintings

in the exhibitions were drawn from a period dating back only to 1935, after he had been in this country five years. They reveal that far from being an original creator, until recently he was an extremely derivative painter, borrowing from Monet, Bonnard, Van Dongen, the early Braque, the middle Braque, Beckmann and several phases of Picasso. His recent excursion into the automatic action painting which has become the trademark of the abstract expressionists seems to be less original research than headlong flight from his betters.

The virtues of modesty shine clearly in the little, almost intimate exhibition of Lyonel Feininger's small-scale oils, watercolors, drawings and prints. The show is based on one theme, fables, a subject which had endless fascination for Feininger, though of course subject matter with him was not of itself important. Actually Feininger was no more of a realist than Hofmann and perhaps less than Davis. Though limited in theme, the Feininger exhibition is less ~~monotonous~~ repetitious than either the Hofmann or Davis shows, being this group of **works** has fugal rather than repetitious; indeed, ~~it has~~ much the same quality of intelligent economy, clarity and purity as does a Bach fugue.

The show of Jacques Lipchitz's bronzes ~~is~~ limited to several small things from each of two widely separated periods: cubist works from 1915-1928 and what he calls "semi-automatics" made the past two years. Through the years, his transition from cubism to a kind of neo-romanticism has been a consistent one, broken only by several short-term adventures of experimentation in free expression as a release from the disciplined method he employs. In the past, these little diversions have served to refresh him, and often they have produced some wonderful minor masterpieces too. To extend the use of musical terms to this exhibition, the term counterpoint is very apt as the two groups though widely separated in time, philosophy and technique do add up to a harmonious whole.

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The State University of Iowa has for many years been recognized as an

DMAC exhibitions 4-4-4

Institution dedicated to the encouragement of ~~xxx~~ creativity in theater, literature, music and art. The Art Department has served as the example which many other universities have sought to emulate, Minnesota, Colorado and Illinois to name a few. Just how effective the Department has been in producing creative artists under its program charted by Dr. Lester Longman is shown in the Summer Exhibition featuring recent work by former students. The show will continue at Iowa City until November 2 when Iowa City plays host to the Midwest College Art Association.

The exhibition might have been even more impressive had the staff made a more selective choice of exhibitors and then hand-picked work to be shown. However, it intent was to have as many former students as would send work to be displayed, and it would have been impossible in any case for the staff to comb the country making selections. The list was as complete as memories and records would allow. We don't know what percentage of entries solicited sent work, but the results add up to a very good cross-section of contemporary American art with prints showing up especially well and sculpture being somewhat under-represented. Several alumni now doing outstanding work are not represented for one reason or another. Even so, it is encouraging to see so many graduates continuing their creative work, and the results must be very heartening to the S. U. I.x staff.