

Report on the Carnegie International

Including sculpture for the first time, the 1958 Pittsburgh exhibition is a brilliant report on current taste and contemporary values on an international scale.

BY HILTON KRAMER

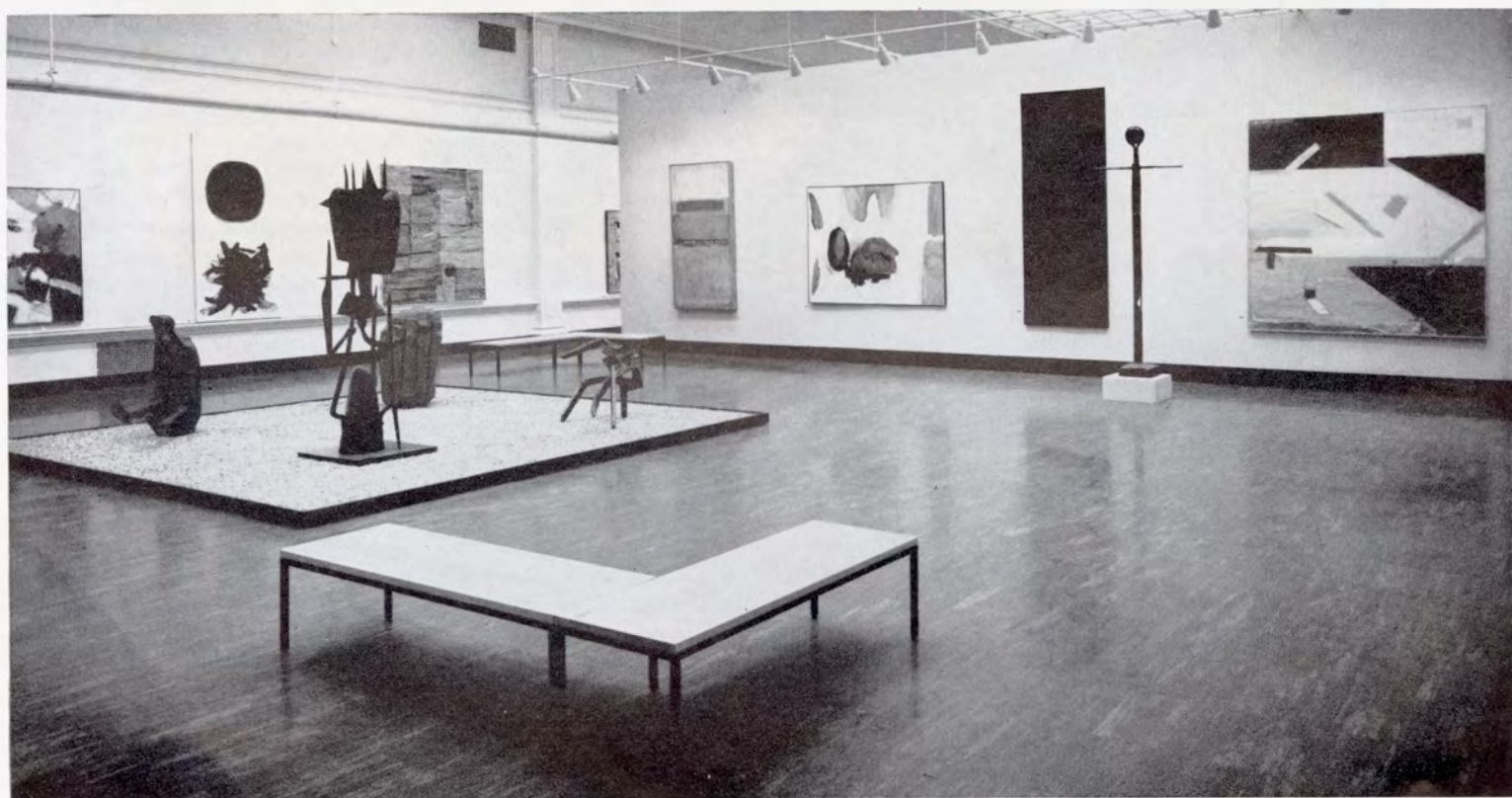
THIS YEAR'S Carnegie International [December 5-February 8], the first since 1955, is a more elaborate event than usual. Normally, the exhibition stands in stark contrast to the industrial blight of Pittsburgh itself, and in the past it has often been the scandal of an ignorant public and its clamoring, Neanderthal newspapers. This year the International has adopted a new civic air in associating itself with Pittsburgh's bicentennial celebrations. It has also cast a retrospective glance at its own past in the form of an exquisite show of ninety-five paintings recalled from earlier Internationals. At the same time it has expanded its coverage of the contemporary scene to include, for the first time, sculpture as well as the customary paintings and miscellaneous oddments of current pictorial art. Thirty-one nations are represented in the exhibition, which includes a total of 494 works. Altogether, it is an ambitious and impressive achievement, an exhibition which is instructive and pleasurable without being didactic or frivolous.

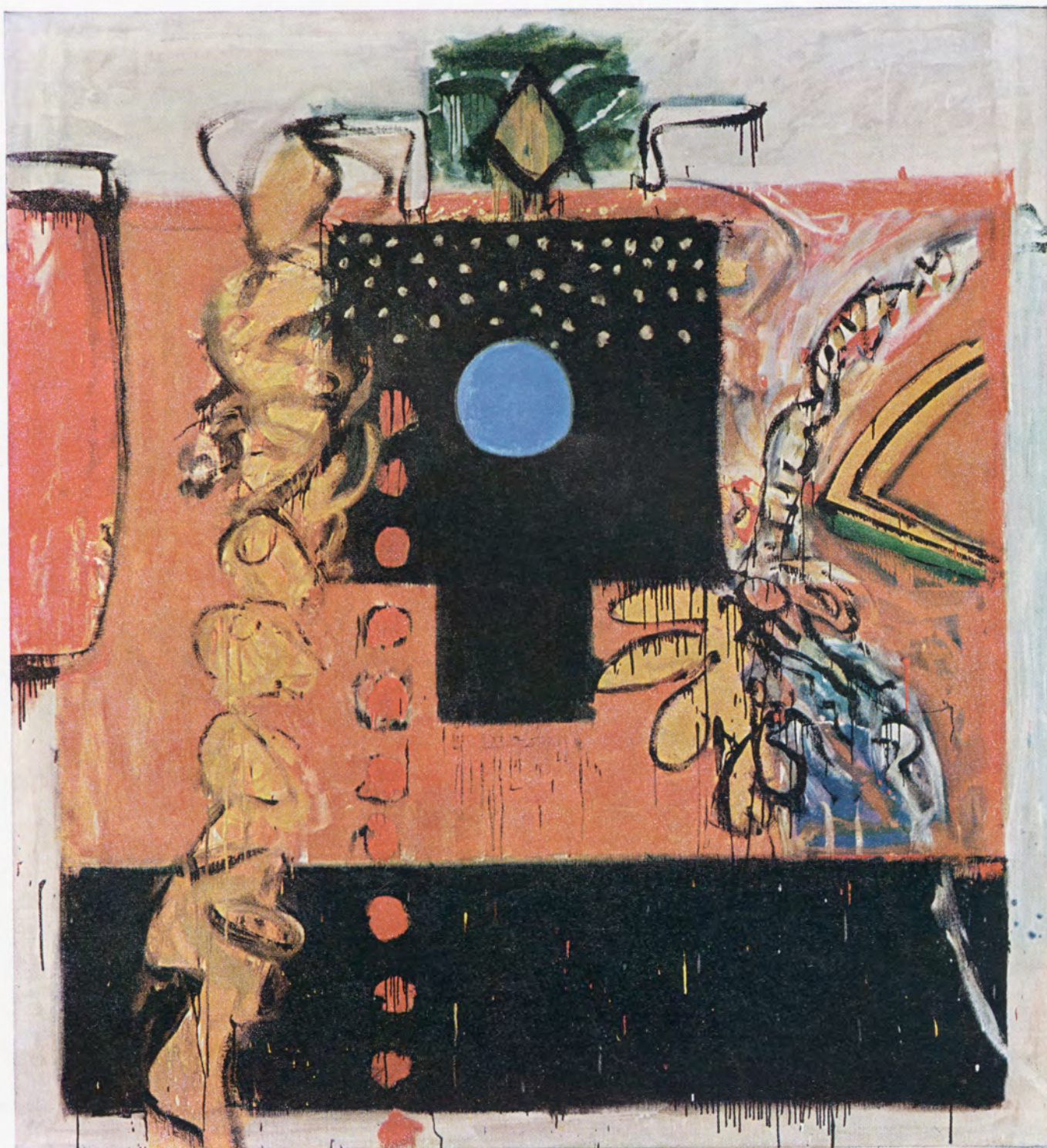
One has doubts, of course, about a number of works included in so vast an array, and it is dismaying to note certain omissions. Yet beyond all doubts, one is struck by the intelligence

of the selection and the clarity of the installation. This year's International is a very large show, large enough to have fallen an easy victim to disorder and confusion in its presentation to the public, and one is all the more grateful for the care—and the eye—which has made of it a model of visual exposition.

Unlike most international exhibitions, the Carnegie is not subject to the vicissitudes of committees operating within subcommittees of still other committees. (At least this is true of the selection. The prizes are another matter, which will be discussed presently.) The selection is the work of Gordon Bailey Washburn, Director of Fine Arts at the Carnegie Institute, and it gains much of its force from being the choice of a coherent point of view. Even though one is often moved to quarrel with specific choices and to question certain aesthetic tastes which limit the exhibition, nevertheless there is a point of view here which is unmincing and clearly stated. One questions it, but one is never in doubt about its identity. That in itself is a welcome relief after so many committee compromises which have passed themselves off as the will of the gods.

It must be noted, however, that this coherence seems to derive





COURTESY WHITECHAPEL ART GALLERY, LONDON

Alan Davie, *Target for NO Shooting*.

Paintings, from left to right: Afro, Adolph Gottlieb, Alberto Burri, Mark Rothko, Wolfgang Hollegha, Ad Reinhardt, Kenzo Okada. Sculpture: Kenneth Armitage, Robert Müller, Etienne-Martin, Eduardo Chillida, F. E. McWilliam.



COURTESY CARNEGIE INSTITUTE

George Cohen, *The Serpent Chooses Adam and Eve.*

from an almost impersonal estimate of the current scene. One feels that the exhibition has been brilliantly calculated, and inevitably this kind of brilliance is a little chilly. One looks in vain for an idiosyncrasy of personal taste. It is not to be found. Mr. Washburn makes no discoveries. Such an effort lies outside his mission, if not his talents.

In itself, this is not particularly distressing. There are plenty of critics among us who make "discoveries" as regularly as their copy deadlines. What is distressing is something quite otherwise: what I can only call Mr. Washburn's short memory. If a painter has not been active on the exhibition scene for a couple of seasons, if he has not lately been caught in a flush of pub-

licity or enjoyed the advantage of an astute dealer, the chances are that he has not been invited to the International. In this respect, it is the younger men who fare best. Mr. Washburn has shown a keen eye in selecting the work of younger or lesser-known artists. It is the older artists who are passed over if they happen not to be current favorites.

In all this, of course, the Carnegie exhibition resembles the current art scene at large. Indeed, it is precisely this *currency* which characterizes the International as an exhibition. Not only does it draw on current work, but as an exhibition it is above all an elaborate report on current taste. It discloses an understanding of this taste which is dazzling in its completeness and

exactitude, and it conforms to it in every particular. For this reason alone it is an historic exhibition: seldom has a period understood its own official view of itself so well.

THE QUALITIES which have evidently been sought out in selecting the Carnegie exhibition are: strength, elegance and clarity of statement. (There is also an interest in the fashionably off-beat, but it is kept discreetly at the margin.) Now these are unequal qualities, and they are not the only qualities one seeks in art; but again, they are the qualities currently in vogue. Of course, they have different meanings for different artists, and they are not always to be found together in the same work. As a result, the burden often falls on the exhibition—that is, on the works in ensemble—to articulate values which are only to be found in a partial, fragmentary form in individual works.

Consider the main gallery of the Carnegie's third floor—a gallery which houses paintings by Kline, De Kooning, Rothko, Okada, Gottlieb, Tapes, Afro, Francis, Reinhardt, Donati and Burri. This gallery is spacious and airy, and it accommodates these outsize pictures with ease. It is not in the least overwhelmed by them, and the arrangement doesn't let anyone off easily. On the contrary, it is a test of strength—elegance and clarity falling, for the moment, into secondary interest—by artists who are either strong or nothing.

It is the Kline—a painting called *Siegfried* from his last New York exhibition—which makes the most emphatic impact. Most of the paintings in this gallery are black and white, or in gray-ocher values, and in this realm at least, Kline is king. His picture is brutal, of course; its strength is the strength of a clenched fist. It can be taken in too quickly, and it leaves one with curiously little in the aftermath. But there is no denying the immediacy of its impact. The painting by Sam Francis to its right looks effete by comparison. It is a picture in which the tendencies of the last decade come together in a mind which makes of everything it touches a sickly design.

The only painting in this gallery which can boast of any of the old-fashioned painterly values is De Kooning's *Gotham News*. This alone speaks volumes on the current crisis in painting. This picture is testimony to De Kooning's failure to effect the larger synthesis of his classical abstraction of the late forties and the expressive content of the "Women" paintings of the early fifties—the pictorial synthesis which has been the explicit goal of his painting since he restored it to a completely abstract mode three years ago. American critics have lately begun to speak of De Kooning the way critics everywhere have long spoken of Picasso: as if everything that came from his hand had an equal interest as a pure realization of genius. Once critics have mortgaged their minds to this kind of mythomania, there is no stopping it. But it ought to be said that they have made a cruel choice in seizing upon De Kooning for this role just when his painting has reached a critical impasse. Or is it (one wonders) precisely this impasse which inspires the adulation? Is it perhaps a defense against loss of faith in a hero? The recent criticism of De Kooning leaves one with the impression that if these critics did not believe him to be at the top of his powers at all times, they could not believe in him at all.

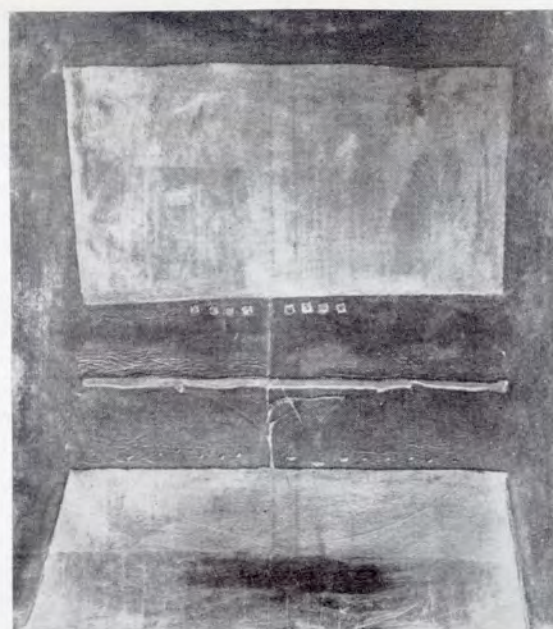
Yet, one has only to glance at the inanity of work like Burri's, Tapes' and others to see why De Kooning retains his stature even in a crisis. A gulf still separates his unrealized expression from the completely realized but utterly vapid work of a figure like Tapes: the one still adheres to a concept of painting as a heightened expression of feeling; the other is only the statement of a bored sensibility whose attenuated sophistication has



Franz Kline, *Siegfried*.



Willem de Kooning, *Gotham News*.



Tapes, *Painting*; First Prize in Painting, \$3,000.

Report on the Carnegie International



Paintings, from left to right: Auguste Herbin, Jean Arp, Josef Albers, Ellsworth Kelly.
Sculpture: Max Bill, Joseph Glasco, Emile Gilioli, Etienne Hajdu.

robbed it of any expressive task worth performing. Should it come as a surprise, then, that it was the latter—Tapiès' slate-gray relief in plaster, cannily entitled *Painting*—which received the Carnegie's top prize of \$3,000 for painting?

I have said that it often falls on the works in ensemble to underscore pictorial values which are isolated and fragmented in single paintings. This gallery provides ample demonstration of that point. As one's eye takes in the succession of plastic statements here—the supererogatory refinements of Reinhardt and Okada; the harsh, expressive ambitions of Kline and De Kooning; the decorative chic of Burri and Francis; and the effort of Afro to find a middle ground between the expressive and the decorative—one is left with an impression either of very small tasks performed supremely well or (less frequent but more interesting) large ambitions compromised by a failure of means. It is the first which convey all the elegance and clarity one could desire; the second reveal the curiously crippled strength. It is only in ensemble, as a collective pictorial experience, that these painters begin to approximate the depth and variety, as well as the infinite capacity of means, which only a few generations ago could be found in a single painting by a master artist. It now requires an enormous *salon* filled with giant pictures to approximate the range of experience which used to adhere to a single canvas, often a very small one at that.

Whatever our sense of loss in this respect, this is the reason that Mr. Washburn's success in the installation of the Carnegie exhibition is a matter of central aesthetic interest and not just

an incidental point of information. Consciously or otherwise, he has had the wisdom to see that the painting of our time requires very special handling in exposition if it is not to degenerate into a series of contradictory statements.

THE CONSCIOUS bringing together of works of common (or related) intellectual affinity at the Carnegie results in several galleries which are sheer tours de force visually and conceptually. The most stunning is the gallery of "Purism" which houses works by Arp (a collage), Albers, Ellsworth Kelly, Fritz Glarner, Myron Stout and Nassos Daphnis, among others. The sculpture in this gallery—a polished brass column by Max Bill, and three exquisite stone carvings by Gilioli, Glasco and Hajdu together on a white platform—confirms an impression conveyed by the painting and collage: namely, of the considerable range of emotion still open to this narrowest of contemporary conventions. The largest statement here, surpassing the didacticism of Albers and even the dilatory perfection of Arp, is Kelly's *Aubade*, a large white and yellow image which has an open-voiced, lyric accent quite removed from the professorial earnestness which often characterizes this mode of painting.

Another of these galleries brings together paintings by Vasarely, Mathieu, Capogrossi, Youngerman, Accardi, Davis, Newman, Nicholson and Dewasne, and sculpture by Albert Terris, Louise Nevelson, James Rosati, Costantino Nivola and Arp. The paintings of Jack Youngerman and Stuart Davis, in

particular, show their strength in this context. Davis' *The Lesson I*, a large oil in black, white, red and green, is quite able to face down the *trompe-l'oeil* high jinks of Vasarely—and in fact, almost everything else in the gallery. Where Davis' art might once have sacrificed its glamour by attaching itself so forthrightly to the pictorial vocabulary of American city life—and thus have appeared tame next to the conceptual acrobatics of Parisian painting—it is this adherence to specific visual experience which now gives him an edge over the likes of Vasarely or Capogrossi, who, by comparison, are quickly reduced to parlor-game strategists in optical effects. Youngerman, I believe, comes off as a painter much the superior of Mathieu—surely the most overrated talent in the international aristocracy of Tachists—through the juxtaposition of their works on adjoining walls.

ONE CANNOT hope to discuss every aspect of an exhibition as large as the Carnegie International, but before going on to the sculpture and the awards, some further notes on the paintings:

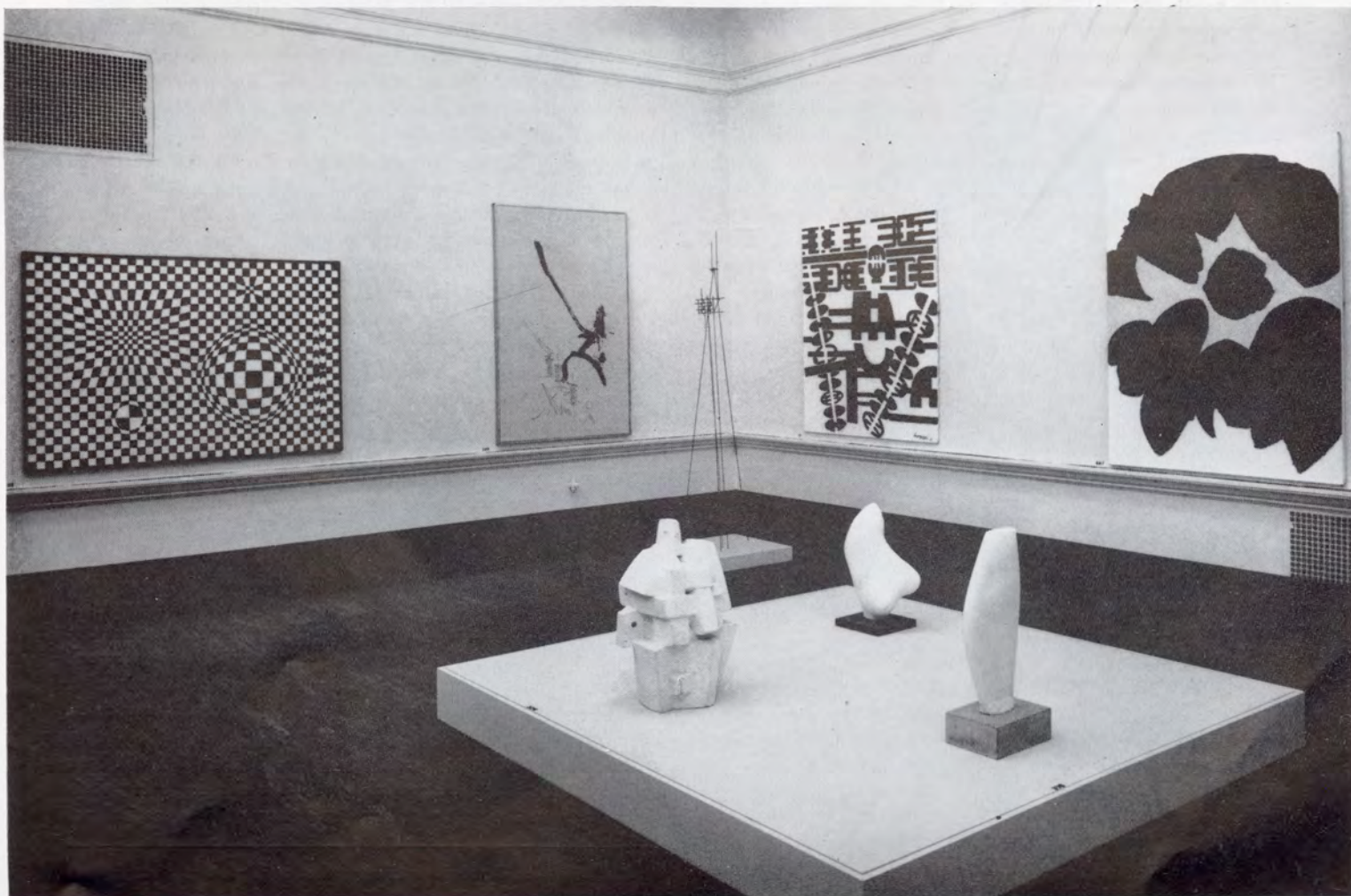
Among the Americans at the Carnegie, I was particularly struck by the force and intellectual density of a painting-collage by George Cohen, entitled *The Serpent Chooses Adam and Eve*. All that this work owes to Picasso and Pollock (or to the Picasso in Pollock?) is obvious, but Cohen takes these materials in a very interesting direction. He is creating a symbolist mode of painting-collage which attempts a synthesis of the pictorial resources of Abstract Expressionism with the kind of symbolic

metaphor usually associated with—and therefore usually discredited with—Surrealism. This is a move contrary to the current pull of history, which is toward the systematic emptying of pictorial content, and it will be interesting to see where it leads. Certainly among the newer collagists and constructionists who currently make a claim on one's attention, Cohen is one of the very few who has a pictorial philosophy worth the name. Unlike some others, he has not made the collage either a plaything for grownups or a coterie scandal.

Thinking back on a visit to London and St. Ives a year ago, I had looked forward to seeing the English painters at the Carnegie, but with two exceptions—Alan Davie and William Scott—I found them disappointing. Davie's *Target for NO Shooting* is probably the artist's best picture so far exhibited here, and Scott's *Orange and Pink* is a fine abstraction of his characteristic still-life themes, but otherwise I thought the English section undistinguished. I thought it particularly unfortunate that Terry Frost was not represented by a work which more closely approximates the current scale of his achievement, and that neither Bryan Wynter nor Roger Hilton was represented at all.

Among the French paintings—which as a group seemed quite as defensive and evasive as French painting at large—was one of the singular gems of the exhibition: Pierre Tal Coat's *The Journey III*. It is a great pity that New York has not lately had a good look at this painter's work, which is far more distinguished than nine-tenths of the current French painting shown here.

Paintings, from left to right: Victor Vasarely, Georges Mathieu, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Jack Youngerman. Sculpture: Costantino Nivola, Albert Terris (to rear), Jean Arp, James Rosati.





Pierre Tal Coat, *The Journey III*.

IN TURNING to the sculpture at the Carnegie, it is difficult to be entirely fair to the large number of first-class pieces which have been assembled in Pittsburgh, for they are made to assume a very dubious role in the exhibition. This is the first year that sculpture has been included in the International, and I think Mr. Washburn passed up a great opportunity to underscore the current pre-eminence of sculpture among the arts. This could have been a truly historic event, but in this department at least, it has turned out to be rather perfunctory.

The chief criticism one can make of the sculpture at the Carnegie is a criticism of scale. With certain exceptions, the scale of sculpture in the exhibition is very small, and the cumulative impact of this multitude of small, often exquisite sculptures distorts the current preoccupations of sculptors both here and abroad. Nothing like this restraint has obtained in choosing the painting: there Mr. Washburn has responded to current practice, and I wish he had done the same in selecting the sculpture. The whole quality and meaning of the exhibition would have been changed—for the better, I think—if there had been much larger, more monumental works by Smith, Nevelson, Hajdu, Hepworth, Lassaw, Lipchitz, Nivola, Paolozzi, Pevsner, Richier, Stankiewicz and some others. All these artists are included at the Carnegie, but often by work which scarcely begins to convey the true scale of their ideas. The great size of the paintings, moreover, confers on these small sculptures the status of a marginal art, whereas exactly the contrary is now the case.

The few exceptions to this de-emphasis of scale are so exceptional that one immediately feels imposed upon by ulterior motives. The huge Calder mobile, twenty-eight feet in height, which is temporarily installed in the enormous, open stair-well of the Carnegie Institute, no doubt impresses the public exceedingly, just as it did—and was intended to—the committee on awards. But really, Calder's idea—in the end he comes to have only one brilliant but not very far-reaching idea—grows smaller as his work grows bigger. He is one of the few important sculptors on the contemporary scene who does not enlarge his con-

ceptual range by increasing the scale of his work.

The other large sculptures—still small, of course, compared to the Calder—are Henry Moore's *Reclining Figure*, Robert Müller's *Ex Voto*, Mirko's *Motivo Ancestrale Grande*, Noguchi's *Avatar*, Manzù's *Cardinal*, Lynn Chadwick's *Encounter V* and Theodore Roszak's *Hound of Heaven*. The Moore and the Mirko are especially fine examples of their work, and the Müller brings to this country (for the first time?) one of the finest sculptors in Europe.* (He is a Swiss working in Paris.) But the choice seems arbitrary, and more directly addressed to the awards committee than to the sculptural scene at large. These few sizable pieces do nothing to rescue sculpture from the secondary status which has been assigned to it in the exhibition as a whole.

It should be noted, however, that by and large the sculpture has been installed with an affectionate respect for its own spatial quality. In the larger galleries there are delightful, pebbled "gardens" for sculpture which provide it with an ambience of its own, and elsewhere there has been an obvious effort to provide suitable platforms and pedestals. Of course, the pervasive small scale of the sculpture presents aggravating problems in exposition which would not have occurred in the first place had the general scale been larger.

IT REMAINS to say a word on the awards, and the first word must be that the awards are not to be confused with the exhibition. The exhibition has scope and brilliance, whereas the awards are narrow and "interested." The exhibition is the result of many months' labor, supported by several years of planning and deliberation. The awards are the result of a concentrated few days of astute politicking. It goes without saying that jurors with the widest experience on committees of this kind will have developed the most successful techniques for imposing their judgments on the group at large and thus enjoy a tactical ad-

* I note in the Carnegie catalogue that Müller's sculpture is borrowed from the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

vantage which will make itself felt in the final list of prizes. The Carnegie awards [the complete list of jurors and awards appears on page 10] clearly bear the stamp of two jurors in particular: Mr. Sweeney and Professor Venturi. One need only note that Mr. Sweeney has authored monographs on Calder and Moore, who took the first and second sculpture awards, and on Burri, who placed third in painting. Professor Venturi's loyal support of contemporary Italian art is well known, and it was scarcely surprising then to see the names of Afro and Consagra prominent among the winners. The first prize to Tapies is entirely in keeping with Mr. Sweeney's Paris orientation. The truth is that while the aesthetic accent of the International as a whole is overwhelmingly American, there was nobody on the Carnegie jury who spoke for American art with the same partisanship that Mr. Sweeney and Professor Venturi brought to their European enthusiasms. Mr. Washburn is to be congratulated for articulating this American accent—so clearly a true reflection of the international art scene today—in choosing the exhibition, and he deserves our sympathy for getting stuck with a jury which disregarded the point so flagrantly.

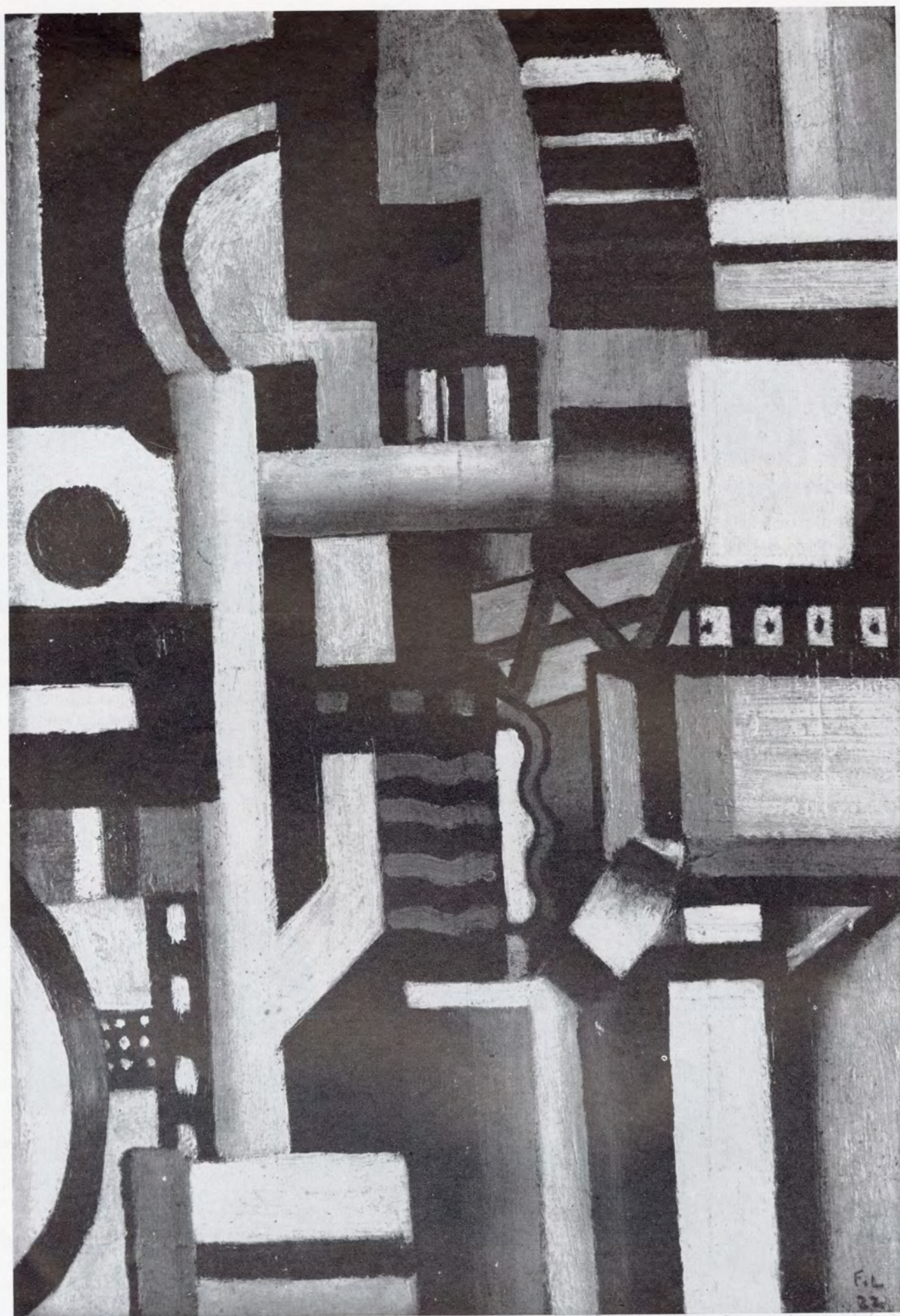
ONE COULD continue to discuss this exhibition at even greater length, but perhaps enough has been said to indicate that it poses the problems of contemporary international art in the most interesting terms. Notwithstanding all the criticisms one feels compelled to make of it, this year's International acquits itself with distinction. Even those who find most to quarrel with in the exhibition remain in its debt, for it does what no other exhibition in this country ever does: it risks a wide-ranging summary of the present moment on an international scale, and thereby compels us to re-examine our experience and judgment.



Alexander Calder, *Pittsburgh*; First Prize in Sculpture, \$3,000.

Henry Moore, *Reclining Figure*;
Second Prize in Sculpture, \$1,500.





Fernand Léger, *Eléments Mécaniques* (1922).