

A ³view.. not waiting approval

'...enter the whore houses but do not sleep in them'

*From
Douens*

PRESENT art societies in countries such as ours are generally little in size but healthily entitled, they prove in the end to be very damaging to the permanent establishment of a functional and more relevantly creative group that can be born out of a true and profound spontaneous need.

These societies are generally formed by expatriates who wish to startle us with methods of their old country while assuming privy to our sense of appreciation of our lives. They align themselves with the native petit bourgeois who, with the sacrificing of his soul, must, at all cost resist the nature of his own earth-groundings.

They are not to be trusted for they are usually formed of a select group of people who come together to toast themselves with baubles and gossip, astutely exchanging one comic vanity for another. They steer clear of controversial situations, but are prompt and opportunistic.

At most they are stubbornly engaged in activating a style of behaviour which puts them in safe positions of authority for their own benefit. At core, they are most insensitive to real issues that confront the country but theirs is a mock theatre at playing a jury for aesthetics.

THEIR ROOTS

Sometimes they are very visible as consultants for and judges of native expression and behaviour they do not understand. They must not be challenged, they disdain criticism by the masses and act to stifle them secretly.

While their identity is with their roots and is a fundamental source of their inspiration, they laugh at ours and instil in us the plight, our pride at being the melting pot.

Very often this group-idea will trap some of our most promising talents. Soon in that web, their fires turn to smoke.

**By
LeRoy
Clarke**

Dr. Boodhoo, one of this country's more serious painters 15 years ago, declares in his message at the annual exhibition of the Trinidad Art Society, of which he is now president: . . . "Great has been our achievements in the past, but many have been the sins of our omissions. Let us dedicate ourselves anew to the re-establishment of the society to its former stature."

This is 1977. We are independent and Republic. Dr. Boodhoo, native and former fire, is trapped. The Trinidad Art Society, with its picnic painters and others, is well and alive and on its jolly way into another phrase of its densely colonial attributes.

THE EXHIBITION

ON ENTERING the annual November exhibition of the Trinidad Art Society of the fatigued National Museum, one must first overcome the annihilating claustrophobia this tidy but overcrowded little place with its head-high dividing screens its poor lighting, its rebellious whirring fan, its too-

closeness for that quiet; what with the many flavoured stories turning in your head that substantial sums of money had been raised from public contributions etc . . . by this Art Society, and even land was given, whose sod was turned to initiate the building of a suitable Art Gallery years ago, you could reel backwards and down the stairs when this whole confusion hits you in 1977!

If you recover from that, you must now manage to pick a point from which to begin to view the 120 works of this fairly large exhibition with an average size of 24 sq. inches per picture, each separated by 15" at the sides, and endless interruptions over and under them.

INGREDIENTS

Sometimes you would swear you saw a painting move, for all the legs of some commotion on the other side of the screens!

You may choose to walk from picture to picture discerning nothing more, in most cases, than the colours that came straight-straight out of the tubes; there is too little example to show evidence of masterful technique as a result of purposeful experimentation.

Just to mention a few ingredients that should strike the eye . . . Brush-stroking,

consistency of textural directions, control of media-densities motif manipulations, character of line, inner style of movement the give and take of pigment values; and the general show of ability to harmonise all this in a statement on a particular subject, all contribute somewhat to good painting.

Then there is the voice of the painter himself in the work, but that is only clear when he has a sense of integrity, for he alone is in constant and intimate judgment of the painting while it is in progress. He knows that it is not enough just to have a desire to say something, or to reproduce images that he sees. That is not enough.

And also, there is the viewer, who himself, must have honest sense of eye. The patience to look into the picture and identify with the many aspects of it, much the same way when meeting another person for the first time.

Painters such as James Boodhoo, Pat Chu Foon, Willi Chen, Holly Guyadeen, Jones Gilbert, M.P. Alladin and Lloyd Harris know all that, even theoretically, but for one reason or many, the works they display here lack that round intention, and in the place of that depth of understanding, that intense dedication and honesty needed to reveal inner meanings of subject as visible image and knowledge, they prefer smart gimmicks to a show of visible control.

This tragedy usually occurs when painters no longer care, when their no longer need to depend on

their honest voice to live. talent is strained for idea and image, or when they

From here on their work grows weary and repetitious, they must now don dark glasses.

Continuing, you may still be curious about what goes on in those shacks depicted; you may want to picnic in that savannah here or on that beach scene there, or even lull a while under a bamboo clump.

But, get close to the pictures, they are virtually early exercises whose titles invite more curiosity than their content can. The idea suffers to be worked into a statement.

IMAGINATION

Some feel that to, let's say, depict a sense of age in a wooden shack, they must simply stain the canvas with a dark pigment; that to interpret light in a pool, leave out the white on the surface. No, light is life. Creation demands much more work from our imagination than that.

The viewer must be invited, stimulated to go be-

yond the surface of things with the painter, he must think; to approach with senses queued-up to begin a conversation with the artist who is now the work itself. His work, our work is now a living truth, an experience.

It is no wonder that Cazon still lives; it is no wonder at all that Codallo never died.

But, among the clouds is that hope of the proverbial silver strands of light. We see Nina Squires, Marcelio Howell, Leo Warner, Mike King, Kendrick Callender and Len Holder.

Nina Squires has always maintained a richness about her, both in person and in her work. She is an intelligent painter who has too little time to paint.

While she has three overly dazzling serigraphs in this show, these are slight echoes of her real strength that is far more subtle and usually gives her renditions of local foliage in particular that inner celebrating spirit of ripe Caribbean fruit.

Her work has always invited me to view it with careful attention, considering nuance on nuance until

these, defined by well built-in decisions, result in some of the finest designs I know.

Mr. Leo Basso, probably

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our oldest painter alive, makes me wonder whether he ever loved to paint . . . does it bring him pleasure but Mr. Basso knows that pleasure has with it, responsibility — and this he has taken over the years.

You may not like either his disproportionate figures or his dark and almost brooding palette, but his statement and technique have resisted the influences of more popular styles and fashions of the years.

He should wear the title they give him — primitive, with pride, for his honesty is remarkable and his work still compels us to share his experience.

Marcelio Howell may

never have seen Haitian painting, but I see in him that healthy link to that major and important source in Caribbean art. The painting 'Douene' is not of his best, as he usually tends to be more deliberate, here though, the idea is too slack and often contrived.

Nan Richards has by now painted too many "apples and peppers." We must prefer to remember her for her early and more persuasive landscapes in oils and watercolours of the early 60s.

Years ago Noel Vaucrosson's watercolours lured us between their skilfully worked overlays and wash. Today, he must admit with these three hurried pieces that he never found that

medium working for him to successfully depict local scenes.

Then there are Lisa Nilsdotter-Henry, Simone Beardwood, Flora Richardson, P. F. Weaire and Sue Liska just to mention an obvious trend, I might win this bet, are our most recent terrible imports, but in Sue Liska as was in Newel Lewis, is the warning, for she makes the point boldest and with style like a new movie.

Leo Warner's collages are imaginative; he makes use of local odds very well and with promise of social comment.

In Mike King and Kendrick Callender I detect a youthful energy and search, they must be afforded good examples, they hold wonderful promise.

There are too few pieces

of sculpture, they are as lost there as they are here for any critical mention other than what is crucial, that this art form is dying even before it was born here, and in spite of Mr. Holder.

If only for the disregard that this country shows for meaningful, lasting cultural development, we should by now have produced a number of artists, whose resources would have tickled a deeper imagination which could spur them on to be more critical and eventually relevant to the development of a more sensible society.

But no, we find that those who profess to be artists are merely a few people who have had the opportunity to show-off their little talents, that are quite basic and raw, that are untried

and lack any depth, be it philosophical, psychological or personal.

They have not come into themselves, they are void of ideas, and therefore lack any sort of image and conviction. No vision here, their forte is a shy intellectualism, a gamut of boring consonants whose direction has no direction.

This exhibition, for all its splurge of raw paint on beaches and shacks and groves and flowers, is safe ground for painters who lack will or muscle.

It is the cemetery for another convention, a picnic; all who cannot see, nor hear, nor smell, or touch, nor take the true pulse of this country are there, and a few others being led away, but who should make an about turn now and prepare to confront the rubbish that is piling up to the relish of this country.

And oh, yes, I wish so hard that the rains will fall