

In and Out with Art

AN UNEXPECTED juxtaposition of Victorian glass, Art Nouveau, pop art, and abstract expressionism can produce surprising correlations. Selected from the permanent collection of the Chrysler Museum in Provincetown, this unlikely combination has been installed there in a series of galleries on the first floor. These four movements span less than a century, but point up the cyclical counteractions and parallels that make art history.

First comes the Victorian glass, most of it from New England. This mad profusion of over-ornamented, frowzy, multi-colored, technically sophisticated objects is in such lavish bad taste as to become at once the history of an era and yet a composite work of art. Dull taste is never more than dull, but recklessly bad taste often turns into art, especially when invention is rampant.

One need only glance at the fantastic excrescences with which New England craftsmen decorated useful objects to realize that these Victorian glass bowls, dishes, vases, bottles, containers, and chandeliers, at their most irrational, out-

pop pop, and even rival surrealism. Often in very high relief, prickly branches, luscious fruit, tangled leaves, rocks, and tree bark all seem to grow compulsively. Some pieces frankly imitate satin, some tortoise-shell, others evoke dazzling fake sunsets. Color can be meltingly sentimental or as astringent as op. That form should follow function was inconceivable to the Victorians. The more obsessive their search for novelty, the more explosive their final vision.

FROM Victorian glass to pop art is an easy transition, for the latter is also at its best when dealing with obsessive images. Moving from late nineteenth-century frills to contemporary conceits is accomplished at the Chrysler Museum without a jolt. Both schools, to be sure, show the same preoccupation with the object as a tangible fact and as the prime theme of life. And they both are at their most persuasive when the object takes on hallucinatory overtones, be it a bulging apple on a glass or a high-heeled shoe encrusted with tumor-like growths.

The shoe forms part of an environ-

mental ensemble by Kusama, a young Japanese woman who lives in New York. Called *Ten Guest Table*, this large, padded still life, with its half-nightmarish, half-realistic anthropomorphic forms, is surrounded by a garden of multishaped macaroni, and by ten pairs of women's shoes that help explain the title. Nearby hangs a gold coat covered with bulbous fungi. No simple statement of fact, this unlikely assemblage invests familiar objects with delusive associations. Vaguely menacing, it vacillates between unreasonable growth and inexorable decay, between fantasy and fact, for one can but presume the guests are as diseased and empty as their shoes.

Though all the customary pop artists are included at the Chrysler, it is Yoshida, yet another Japanese from New York, who impressed me with a large coffin-like box, its lid partly open and filled with rattling pebbles (or could they be bones?). Environmental works such as this scarcely lend themselves to home consumption, nor to public buildings where they could seem over-personal. However, in occasional museum encounters, they can be highly evocative.

More amenable to daily use, but no less hypnotic, is a small early work by Marisol called *Leo Castelli's Dog*. How much Marisol has sacrificed to her recent insistence on multiple, over-elaborated self-portraits is evident here, for only a few years ago she managed to make one little animal run the gamut of



"Loie Fuller" (Art Nouveau lamp)



"Mushroom Overcoat," by Kusama

—Photos by Craig.

emotions, from lascivious nastiness to puppy-like innocence. The dog has all the compulsive intensity of a primitive amulet. With both pop and Victorian art, it is visual surprises that first attract us, but later only strong associative images hold our attention by producing more than momentary shocks.

In a succeeding gallery, several abstract expressionist canvases are the antithesis of everything that Victorian and pop art stand for, and, indeed, are the very spark that ignited pop's rebellion. *Zinc Yellow*, a painting by Franz Kline, spreads open to let in light and space, or, better, to become light and space. No finite image, invented or naturalistic, dominated this artist's brush. The painting itself is the object. While the abstract expressionists tried to escape from the materialism of their world, the pop artists accepted it as a *fait accompli*.

Three canvases by Hans Hofmann, two of them major works, remind one of the long productive years he spent in Provincetown. Less concerned with space than with blazing color and blinding light his work epitomizes Cape Cod. To look out any window at the Chrysler Museum and watch the sun streaking over a restless sea is to understand Hofmann better. Wisely realizing that changing light and color can never be reproduced, he developed his own way of paraphrasing these illusions. Unlike the impressionists, he did not suggest atmospheric effects; instead he aroused the emotions that such effects induce.

And finally there is Art Nouveau, full of swirling botanical marvels and curvilinear lilting ladies. More knowingly designed than the Victorian art it came from and reacted against, Art Nouveau depended on strong linear rhythms, on symbolic content, and on the ornamental influence of growing plants. From the Chrysler Show, I remember with pleasure a bentwood chaise longue by Thonet, as supple as a curving reed, as elegant as a fashionable *fin-de-siècle* silhouette. And I am still haunted by a gold lamp representing Loie Fuller at her most sinuous. With exaggerated flowing robes whipping around her, she becomes the distillation of all willowy womanhood. Hidden within her floating draperies is an electric light bulb, the only indication that this romantic sculpture was intended as a useful object.

Art Nouveau denied the materialism that the Victorian tradition embraced, precisely as abstract expressionism tried to escape the materialism that pop art celebrates. What the Chrysler installation reveals, *par excellence*, is the inevitable sequence of acceptance and repudiation that orders the course of art. Also clear is how insistently art grows from and reacts against art and life—the two sources on which it feeds.

—KATHARINE KUH.

Chess Corner — No. 105

THOUGH BLACK is always a tactical move behind White in the opening, he has quite a few ways to take over the psychological initiative. He can do this by injecting into the supposedly routine debut an unexpected move. Faced with the novelty, White is apt to mismanage its nuances.

In the game below, played in the Oak Memorial Tournament of California between S. Rains and S. Parker, Black varies from the normal routine, playing 2... N-KB3, instead of the usual 2... N-QB3. This leads to a bizarre turn.

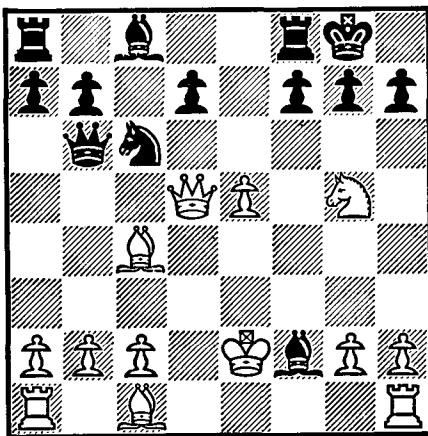
SICILIAN DEFENSE

Rains White	Parker Black	Rains White	Parker Black
1 P-K4	P-QB4	6 NxN	PxN
2 N-KB3	N-KB3	7 PxP	BxP
3 P-K5	N-Q4	8 QxP	Q-N3
4 N-B3	P-K3	9 B-QB4	BxPch
5 P-Q4	N-QB3	10 K-K2	O-O

Black sacrificed a Pawn; White accepted and returned it to maintain his lead in development. But White's King is prodded into a sense of insecurity.

11 N-N5

Impetuously attempting to exploit his superior development. Correct is 11 R-B1 with additional pressure on Black's vulnerable KB2.



11 B-R5?

Black misses his chance. He has a sockdolager in 11... P-Q3. Then 12 NxBP, B-K3!! 13 QxB?, N-Q5ch, winning the Queen.

12 B-K3	QxP	15 N-R6ch	K-R1
13 NxBP	QxPch	16 QR-KB1	B-B3
14 B-Q2	N-K2	17 N-B7ch	K-N1
18 N-R6ch		Drawn	

In the final position, White need not accept a draw as he enjoys winning chances. E.g., 18... K-R1 19 N-B7ch, K-N1 20 Q-Q3. White will recover at least a Pawn, retaining a passed Pawn. Black's debut surely led to sharp play.

—AL HOROWITZ.

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