

# Cosmo Campoli's Spumoni Village

"THE recent big buildings downtown all remind me of Zippo lighters; what we need is architecture that looks like potatoes. More shoe-painting parties wouldn't hurt, either. Everybody loves a homely shoe."

There is always a temptation to quote Cosmo Campoli, and then to go on quoting him. I will resist henceforward.

I need every bit of this space just to describe the implausible show he and his friends have assembled in Gallery 1134, at 1134 Washington, not to mention an exhibition at the Renaissance Society, 1010 E. 59th, which is also worthy of note and fully 180 degrees opposite Campoli's.

**CAMPOLI AT 54** is one of the more storied Chicago artists. Once it looked as if the world lay before him like a waiting feast.

He had talent, charm and ample support from people who counted. But he was and still is a quirky, zany, willful temperament who has spent his prodigious gifts by shooting them in all

directions rather than concentrating them in single lines of thought — the way most artists do, canny creatures.

So by now Cosmo is as much a character around town as an artist. I daresay there are those who would doubt that what he is exhibiting at Gallery 1134 qualifies as art, leastwise as serious art, it is so wild, funky and centrifugally scattered into phantasmagoric environments teeming with found objects, dayglo paint, glitter dust and God knows what all.

You can't quite tell where his work ends and that of his friends and stylistic beneficiaries begins. Nearby are the products of Sheri Lynn Smith, Thomas Cvetkovich, Sonya Weber Gilkey and Nancy Forest Brown.

**CLOSER** examination suggests that each of these artists has his or her own personality, yet all of them, like Campoli, have built a spread of installation pieces that pulse, zap and twitter in a tumult of color and form.

Two hundred shoes, painted



franz  
schulze

by that many Chicago schoolchildren, also lie around the gallery. The place looks like an exploded 1930s dime store.

What it is, according to the gallery announcement, is Spumoni Village, and it is very nearly more an event than a show. On opening night, everybody dressed up, ate cookies and ice cream, played music and carried on like tourists at a Sicilian carnival.

The gallery is ideal for this sort of thing, since it is a former casket display space, with faded, flowered wall-to-wall carpeting, ancient oak-paneled walls and dead white fluted wooden columns. Perfectly outrageous.

Nearly all the rest of the work is too, including some bumptious bio-mechano-eroticism by Andrew Prueher, and Rudolph Beegen's pool of bubbling muck surrounded by live mushrooms and a dancing fire.

**THE INSTALLATIONS** of Larry Crost and Story Mann, the performance-installations by the team of Gundersen and Clark, and the sculptures of Arlene Becker are only slightly less extravagant in mood. Robert Hutchison's minimal yet spumoni-hued constructions are the soberest things on view.

Is there a judgment behind all this description? Yes, a properly ambivalent one. A lot of zest and even some talent are on view here: Unless you have very blue-lipped tastes, it is hard not to be caught up in the raunchy animal energy of it all.

It is also hard to take it seriously, except in fragments, most of them provided by Campoli, Crost, Becker, Gundersen and Clark. The work is somewhat like late romantic salon painting of the 19th Century: rich, often extravagant in ideas, undisciplined in, perhaps unconscious of, the demands of formal

realization. The real question is, if you were to cut back all this rampant jungle growth, would you also kill the organism it springs from?

**THAT QUESTION** has utterly no bearing in the exhibition of drawings by American artists — most of them from New York — at the Renaissance Society. For if the crowd at Gallery 1134 are uncorseted romantics, those at the Renaissance Society are contemporary classicists of the strictest order.

Certainly they tend to favor understatement and brevity of expression. In fact, the work has been properly titled by gallery director Susanne Ghez as "Ideas on Paper," with the implication that it stands for something more conceptual than realizable in form.

"Ideal," Dennis Adrian calls these works in his likewise brief but clear-headed catalog essay. Since they are the visual projections of something that may be more provocative in an intellectual than in a physical state, it is no surprise that they are formally very terse.

In any case, they were done by some of the most respected current practitioners of conceptual/abstract art in America:

Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Brice Marden, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra and Joel Shapiro, to name just seven who are represented by specially persuasive efforts.

**TO THE** extent that taste is a factor among the Renaissance Society artists, their work is generally impeccable, coolly and nimbly conceived, precise.

It is, after all, mostly unadorned for the most part — so much so, in fact, that one may find himself yearning for more to look at, just as at Gallery 1134 he wishes there might be less. And this implies a curious parallel between two shows otherwise vastly dissimilar. Both of them are fundamentally anti-formal. At Gallery 1134, form is sacrificed to narrative and metaphor; at the Renaissance Society, it is given up to concept.

If you discover yourself liking one of these remarkable exhibitions more than the other, it may say less about the quality of the artists on view and more about your own prejudices as to what can be profitably offered in place of form. My own are that form is not expendable as either show as a whole — certainly the more nearly extreme passages of each — seems to suggest.