

# Color it a vintage year

By Franz Schulze

THE CHICAGO art world today is substantially more active, vigorous and multifaceted than at any time within memory.

And 1976 has done a lot to make it so.

Granted, this is not quite a unanimous opinion. There may even be more grousing about the scene than ever before, though I am inclined to interpret that as confirmation rather than rebuttal of the state of things.

Expectations always rise as achievement opens possibilities.

People clamor for something only when they begin to figure there is an improved chance they may get it.

Artists, for instance, say there are not enough places in town to show.

Nonetheless, private galleries as good, lively and serious as Young-Hoffman, Dart, Chicago, (1134), Zolla-Lieberman, Dobrick, Worthington and Boyd all opened during the year. And no more than one or two places of comparable quality were obliged to shut down.

Add to this other expansive developments: B. C. Holland

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resumed public exhibitions, while several firms moved to larger quarters—Gilman on E. Ohio, Horwich on E. Ontario, Nancy Lurie on N. La Salle and Artemisia on W. Hubbard.

The last of these, along with Zolla-Lieberman and the adventurous N.A.M.E., have helped the Chicago gallery neighborhood to leap west of the once-forbidding barrier of State St.

MEANWHILE, exhibitions were frequently seen in places not usually given over to them. The remarkable light show of last summer by S. Thomas Scarff at the Museum of Science and Industry comes to mind.

So does the biggest exhibition of the year in terms of square footage: the ensemble of monumental sculpture staged over a nearly horizon-to-horizon landscape at Governors State University in Park Forest South.

To be sure, displays like those last two have occurred before. By themselves they

don't necessarily enlarge the scene. On the contrary—and this is the point—they are almost taken for granted now, in all their literally far-flung diversity.

Do you recall—it was no more than five years ago—when the Chicago art world was a tight little island so concentrated around Michigan and Ontario that every face within that precinct knew every other face? It made not



only for cultural inbreeding and parochialism, but for a certain paranoid defensiveness as well.

These psychologies function now only vestigially. The star attraction of the early '70s in Chicago—the Imagist movement—still exists in the form of its individuals, as distinct from the group, and the individuals continue, it seems, to mature.

BUT A whole new generation, and maybe more than one, has surfaced in the meantime. It is overfacile to lump the latter under the heading "Chicago abstractionists."

They are too varied, in both expressive ends and means.

Nowadays one can identify the installation artists, the film and video freaks, the feminist group, the conceptualists, a scattering of neorealists, even a clutch of bright architects resourceful enough to use the gallery world to forward their work.

And there are more such subcultures, as it were, with multiple overlapping—no longer one art world, but a number of them.

The denizens don't cluster any more in the same salons along the Drive, or dress up for receptions at the Arts Club or dress down for stomps at the Hyde Park Art Center—though those ceremonies and places still flourish. Rather, they meet in districts such as (can the old-timers believe it?) Rogers Park, Evanston, Lincoln Av.

JIM NUTT and Gladys Nilsson live in Wilmette, closer to elm trees than to deteriorating viaducts. Corey Postiglione titles a folio of his graphics after the Far North Side street he once lived on—Wallen.

And bright art students aren't confined to the School of the Art Institute or the Institute of Design. They are working at Circle Campus, the University of Chicago's Midway Studios, even in remote Northwestern.

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Cosmo Campoli's comic "Spumoni Village."

The Museum of Contemporary Art in turn has gone through its rites of passage by beginning to assemble a permanent collection, to be housed in an adjacent 5,000-square-foot space.

Eight miles away, the University of Chicago's Smart Gallery has become, in a short couple of seasons, something the city never really knew in concentration before: a study collection for graduate art history students.

THERE IS even some significance in the fact that this year-end review has gone on as long as it has without mention of the most important institution in town, the Art Institute.

The balance sheet there is not so halcyon, the outlook

less progressive. The museum has failed to keep pace with the city's art world, though its conservative look is apparent partly because so much around it has moved ahead so much faster.

Besides, its budgetary problems make everyone else's look simple. It did, after all, stage several impressive shows this year, such as "The Age of Louis XV," the 72d Annual of American Art, the Eugene V. Thaw Drawing Collection, the splendid review of French and Belgian Art Nouveau and the Ensor retrospective still running.

Thanks be for those, though no thanks for the turkey of the year, that slickly ostentatious, state-fair-type Bicentennial package, "The World of Franklin and Jefferson."

The museum evidently needs to do some soul-searching, though the prospect of that is less than felicitous, since its board gives little sign of bestirring itself. It still looks like an old club governed by old club members who have run

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things their way for so long that they cannot seem to imagine running things any other way, or letting somebody else try.

AS TO the memorable individual events of the year, they have been too numerous to list here except briefly.

The MCA's big moments were its most controversial: "Abstract Art in Chicago" and "100 Years of Architecture in Chicago." Both shows spawned countershows, the most impressive being "Chicago Architects" at the Time & Life Building.

The Hyde Park Art Center

marked its brilliant 38-year history with a group review of its, well, discoveries—not an inappropriate word for the Chicago artists the HPAC believed in before nearly every- one else did.

The School of the Art Institute celebrated its new digs by paying homage to its own, in a fall display of some of the best artists who ever studied in Chicago.

AMONG one-man shows, a few of the more provocative were Dan Ramirez at Chicago; Jacques Villon's graphics, at Johnson-International and the Art Institute; Cosmo Campoli's "Spumoni Village" at reflection.

1134; Ellen Lanyon at Gray; Erica at Baruch; Barbara Rossi at Kind; Robert Smithson at the Renaissance Society, and H. C. Westermann at Frumkin.

A very good year. The fact that one has consciously to think of Chicago as behaving noticeably more like a cosmopolis than like a big provincial art town is proof that it is not yet a cosmopolis.

On the other hand, the thought is not outrageous; moreover, the gap between thought and fact seems to be closing. There's no better collective holiday gift than that

"Spirit"



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