

Art With a Different Point of View

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Carlos Villa has put together a survey of Third World art for Bicentennial show at the San Francisco Art Institute. The show has been called *Other Sources*, implying a separateness between the Third World and what Phil Linhares has called the "Beaux-Arts sensibilities of European culture;" to a degree the separateness is real, and the work on display is not to be judged by the same standards as a Rembrandt or a Rauschenberg.

To be judged! There's the Beaux-Arts approach for you—and an approach which many of these artists are probably heartily tired of. The fact is that their work, like all true 20th-century art, has left the tradition of the fine art object—well, if not behind, at least to one side. The concern here is not to produce the beautiful object; it is to express or to search the quality of life through a visual analogy of some kind.

The show is accompanied by a catalogue with statements by all sorts of art scene people hereabouts, this writer included. John FitzGibbon points out that Third World art shares an intriguing stance with the mainstream modernists since Manet: their art is *against sentiment*. The work is virile, expressive, frequently doing its own judging. It is not entertaining or (merely) pretty.

It seems to me that the least effective of this work takes too seriously its obligation to be "about" the Third World—that is, work which illustrates an exploited or disenfranchised society, or which seeks to revive a lost or esoteric imagery. The outrage of some of the muralists



'Sunday Morning in the Mines' by Gold Rush artist Charles Nahl: moralizing in a period genre painting

Indian artists are artists first, members of a heritage group second. More to the point, it shows that contemporary art as it is practiced in our area speaks truthfully and eloquently from its own sources, and that those sources are profound and universal.

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Our art is not universally appreciated, however. Reviewing the current San Francisco Museum of Modern Art a few weeks back, we quoted Henry Hopkins' remarks to the effect that California (and especially Bay Area) artists had a well-developed sense of

not Diebenkorn, not Elmer Bischoff. Nor are any of the important artists from the next generation: Oliveira, Brown, Neri, Light, DeFeo, Raffael, Wiley. The early painters are equally neglected: the Mathews, Martinez, Dixon, Piazzoni, Hahn, Nahl.

Fortunately, we have the tireless Oakland Museum to rectify these injustices. They currently offer two fine shows, a survey of the Gold Rush paintings of Charles Nahl and a retrospective of the sculpture (and some paintings) of Manuel Neri. (A big Thiebaud show has been announced for the near fu-

ture. cause of his Italian-American background: that heritage combines with the Abstract Expressionist-Bay Area Figurative background of his Art Institute student days to produce haunting insights into the fleeting, vulnerable, yet dignified human condition as allegorized in the human figure.

Neri works mostly in plas-

ter, occasionally forsaking that medium for paper or fiber glass—rarely, bronze—versions of the plaster sculpture. The finished work is a record of its own creation: tool marks, occasional touches of color, cloth, wood or wire from the armature—all such traces remain on the figure, which bears these scars as our bodies (and minds!) continue to carry signs of random

scarrings from our experience.

There's no way a critic can comment on work like this. It is eloquent, powerful, yet so ly beautiful. The sculpture seems to be aware of the viewer, but uninvolved. It exists on its own terms, quietly contemplating something—perhaps its own other sources

The Art Institute show will be up until Nov. 7, open free of charge. The Charles Nahl show at the Oakland Museum runs through Oct. 31; the Neri show through Nov. 22. Other current noteworthy shows are those of Elizabeth Quandt and Ursula Schneider in the East bay and the Braunstein/Quay Charles Campbell, Maxwell and Thackery and Robertson galleries in San Francisco; for details see the Art Calendar. If you are in Benicia, a new gallery in the old railroad station at the foot of the main street is well worth visiting. It has work by Edward Higgins, Norman Stieglmeyer, Roy DeForest, Harold Schlotzhauer and others—the Higgins alone worth the trip.