

## EXHIBITIONS

## Year of the Mechanical Rabbit

Every other year, Venice resumes its ancient, skulduggeryish air of a medieval city-state choosing a doge. The modern version is the International Biennale of Art, which last week, in its 33rd session, pitted more than 270 artists from 37 nations in an oftentimes murky, sometimes catty battle for supremacy. Over the years, jurors have been called corrupt, the *vernissage*\* week of hanging and judging has been sneered away as a mere carnival, and the prizes have been dismissed as being as meaningless as leather medals.

**The Contessa & the Jappinging.** Yet, for all the vintage grapes of wrath, the summer-long show is still the world's most important international display of contemporary art. And although its prizes have sometimes been awarded as a result of flackery, they are often rewards for achievement in new fields of art. In 1964, for the second time in the Biennale's history, the U.S. won the top international prize, for the litterish paintings of Robert Rauschenberg (Alexander Calder's sculpture won in 1952). This year, despite a powerful push behind the U.S.'s pop-eyed Roy Lichtenstein, whose work has evolved from hyperintense comic-book panels, the grand international prize in painting went to a relatively unknown kinetic artist from Argentina, Julio Le Parc.

As always, the carnival atmosphere was frenetic. One contessa's elegant evening of black-tie art patronage wound up with frugging into the wee hours until neighbors, annoyed at the noise, pelted the windows with pebbles. Artist François Dallegret, who fashions fantastic automobiles, decked himself out

\* Meaning "varnishing" in French, recalling the times when artists coated their works with a slick finish before the public was admitted.

like a skyrocket in a whiz-bang blazer of multicolored baby bunting. A Japanese clothed all in bright green staged a sort of Zen happening (a Jappinging?) by sitting down right in the middle of Piazza San Marco, but by then everyone was too sated and wilted by the heat to care.

Between boat trips to the Lido to cool in the sea, there was the endless rounds of drinking and gabbing in outdoor cafés on the pigeon-infested piazza. And everywhere the parties went, there was one fellow sure to go—a man who insisted that he was from the U.S. Department of the Interior dealing "with Indian and Eskimo art." Of course, no Indians or Eskimos were represented.

**Alloway Went Thataway.** Just about every other group was, though (*see color pages*). In their late-Czarist pavilion, bearing a hammer and sickle, the Russians displayed their usual Soviet pop, in which Lenin portraits are repeated with the regularity and exactitude of Campbell's Soup cans. The Austrians laid claim to some sort of verbiage prize with an entry by one Curt Stenvert. It consisted of a gilded skeleton sharing a glass case with a sexy mannequin, knee high in artificial flowers and covered with photographed tattoos. Title: *38th Human Situation: As a Deceased Tycoon to bequeath your Charming Widow your own Gilt Skeleton*.

The brick U.S. Pavilion, which resembles a miniature Monticello, nearly wound up empty. For the first time, the Smithsonian Institution's National Collection of Fine Arts was charged with the job of filling it. The Smithsonian, in turn, asked the British-born curator of New York's Guggenheim Museum, Lawrence Alloway, 39, to select what was finest in American art. Alloway, credited with coining the term pop, picked the late Jackson Pollock, the late David Smith, Joseph Cornell, maker of bric-a-brac-packed

boxes, Ernest Trova, who endlessly repeats images of falling men, and Roy Lichtenstein. His choice was promptly amended by his boss, Guggenheim Director Thomas Messer, who dropped Lichtenstein and Pollock and chose mostly sculpture. Displeased, the Smithsonian then turned the whole deal over to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's associate curator, Henry Geldzahler, 30. Last week Alloway resigned from the Guggenheim.

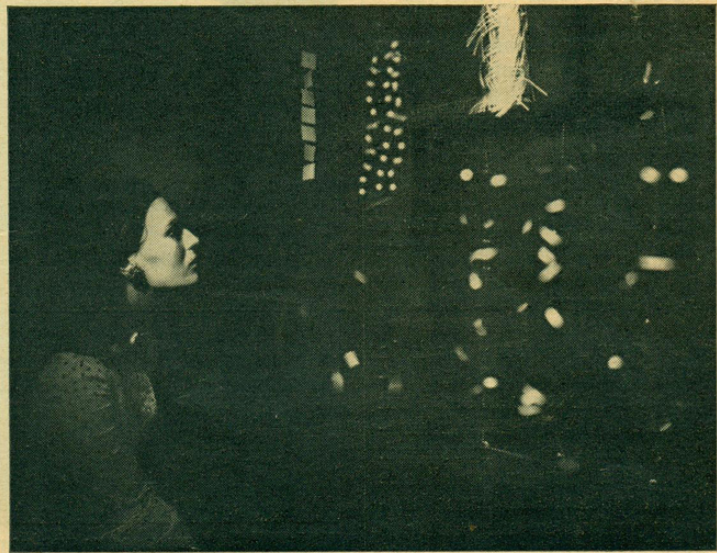
**Conservative Split.** Geldzahler is a plump, underdone dumpling in granny spectacles who is so appealing that he has been rendered by several artists as a pop statue. Even French Artist Martial Raysse entered a portrait of the U.S. commissioner at the Biennale. Geldzahler chose a diverse group of hard-edge and stained-canvas abstractionists—Helen Frankenthaler, Jules Olitski, and Ellsworth Kelly—and included, perhaps for poignancy, Roy Lichtenstein's cartoons. He wound up his brief introduction to the U.S. catalogue with the crashing conclusion that "their experiments are successful. They paint beautiful pictures." When all Americans lost, Geldzahler petulantly handed out a statement denouncing prizes as meaningless.

Lichtenstein was touted early as a potential winner; indeed his dealer, Leo Castelli, went hoarse lobbying for him. But then so were Sweden's Oyvind Fahlström, who makes pop cutouts, Britain's Sculptor Anthony Caro, who studied with Henry Moore, and Germany's young expressionist Horst Antes, who mashes anatomy into a strudel of bright colors. Actually, in sculpture at least, the laurels were split between two rather conservative choices: Etienne Martin, 53, of France, who was rumored to have received a helping hand from Culture Minister André Malraux, and Robert Jacobsen, 54, of Denmark, who makes Model A abstractions in wood, stone and iron.

Only in the painting category did the seven-member international jury, rep-



PRIZEWINNER LE PARC &amp; WIFE



GALLERYGOER VIEWING LE PARC'S ENTRIES

An op-skip-and-a-jump ahead of the pack.