

Not Exactly Trying to Please

By GRACE GLUECK

"I'VE gained status, but lost edge," said Lawrence Alloway the other day, referring to his four-year tenure as curator of the Guggenheim Museum. The statement underlined the frustration that partially explains his resignation from the post last week, a development not unexpected in local art circles. The more immediate cause of it, unacknowledged by either party, was Alloway's clash last February with Guggenheim director Thomas Messer over the museum's selections for the current exhibit at the Venice Biennale. (The Smithsonian Institution, which sponsors U.S. participation in the show, had invited the Guggenheim to select this year's entrants, but withdrew its invitation when the Messer-Alloway controversy became apparent.)

Brisk, Sometimes Brusque

In his years at the Guggenheim, Alloway has not exactly been the sort of museum man that dealers dote on and rich old ladies invite for afternoon tea. Brisk, sometimes brusque, brilliant on and off, he is an unmistakable *vedette* in an art scene where the cult of the curator is strong. Not unreasonably, the term "controversial" is often applied to him. Maturing in postwar England in the era of Angry Young Men (he is 39), Alloway rejected the prevailing anti-American climate to become one of Britain's earliest champions of the new postwar American art. As a critic and deputy director of London's Institute of Contemporary Arts from 1954 to 1957 (somewhere in there he coined the term "pop art"), he earned a reputation as a *wunderkind* for his far-out, well put-together shows and knowledgeable critiques; as an *enfant terrible* for his cocky manner and often arbitrary opinions.

The shows of American art he has staged at the Guggenheim have generated their share of controversy, too—"Morris Louis," "Six Painters and the Object," "The Shaped Canvas," "Eleven from the Reuben Gallery," "Word and Image" and perhaps most controversial of all, Barnett Newman's latest exhibition, "The Stations of the Cross." ("The best show I've done there," Alloway says.) Allo-

way's maverick, unpredictable tastes disturb those who like to follow in a critic a developed line of thought. He has been criticized as brash, opportunistic, a hopper on bandwagons. But even the harshest Alloway-knockers have to admit that much of his critical writing is lively and provocative, and that he keeps diligently *au courant* with the bustling U.S. art scene.

This October he will take up a new post—writer-in-residence at the University of Southern Illinois in Carbondale. There, he says, he will try to get back to writing the kind of "short-term art history" that is his specialty as a critic. Recently, as if by way of preparation, he broke four years of discreet curatorial silence to comment on the local art scene, fire some pot shots at New York museums, pass out advice to young curators and talk about the future of Lawrence Alloway.

"New York museums have by and large neglected American art," he said, relaxing last weekend with his wife, the painter Sylvia Sleigh, on the terrace of a vacation house at Southold, L. I. "In the middle of the 20th century in New York, none of the museums—with the exception of the Jewish—makes proper use of the artists who surround them. They'll show names, yes. They want to compete with each other. If one decides to give an artist a show, they all want to hop on to him. There's a kind of timidity in the way they all latch on to the same people. A great many other artists deserve museum exhibitions, too, but don't get them because the museums are competing for certain stellar talent." (Pressed, Alloway said yes, he was thinking, for example, of this past season's Robert Motherwell show, at one time the subject of competition between the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim. MOMA won.)

Well, but what about museums outside of New York? "They're much more alive and creative and nervy," Alloway said. "The Albright-Knox in Buffalo, the Pasadena Art Museum in California, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis—even the university museums like Bennington.

They show artists when they are still new and young and dangerous, not after they've become Establishments."

Did Alloway feel the Guggenheim, too, had been derelict in presenting shows of U.S. art? "When I went to the Guggenheim, I thought I'd have a chance to put on many more American shows than I did. What I finally got to put on were generally the relics of more ambitious proposals. I had suggested various types of survey shows and, when they didn't work, I broke them down and presented them separately. As it worked out, I managed to do about six in two years." Alloway paused. "Actually, the Guggenheim could be a much more mobile operation. It's smaller than the other museums and theoretically able to move faster. But we've really not approached the Museum of Modern Art's contribution to American art—and that hasn't been what it should be. The Guggenheim could have been a spur to all New York museums if, like Avis Rent-A-Car, we'd tried harder."

Wanted: More Bias

His own term at the Guggenheim, Alloway made clear, had been "a fairly frustrating period. But there were compensations. For one, the great thing about working in a museum is the opportunity for long contact with an artist and his work. I think that's terribly important. If I had to give advice to a young curator, I'd say this: the central requirement for any curator dealing with modern painting is not to lose contact with artists."

And if there could be a museum with ideal working conditions? "It would have to have at least three important factors," Alloway said. "First, mobility. You ought to be able to put on things fast—in a month or so—as well as plan long-range shows. Then, the curatorial staff should have occasional access to the trustees as well as the director, so that both ends of the museum know what's happening. And finally, point of view. Instead of competing for shows and artists, and aiming for the same slice of cake, there should be more bias so you can tell museums apart. But there has to be

a bias out of belief, not out of aggression."

In the five years they have been here, Alloway and his wife have become firmly attached to the United States. At the end of this year, they will become American citizens. "The art and literature produced here is closest to me," Alloway says, "as is the society that produces it." With a wave of his hand, he dismissed London, the Swingin' City. "It still has a curfew of 11. England has made a contribution to fashion, both male and female, and there you are. The new English sculpture? That's exactly like the fashions. The Queen magazine, miniskirts and polychrome sculpture—a package for young moderns. As pop culture, I adore it, but U.S. art is streets ahead."

Wha

NEW YORK CITY

Today

CHARLOTTE WEIN—Downstairs Art Gallery, 5 West 63d Street. To June 26.

Monday

IBM GALLERY, 16 East 57th Street. The Heritage of French Poster Art.

CLIFF JOSEPH—Aspects Gallery, 100 East 10th Street. Paintings and drawings. To July 31.

GEORGEANN WEBER—Aegis Gallery, 89 East 10th Street. Paintings. To July 2.

Tuesday

GALERIE INTERNATIONALE, 1095 Madison Avenue. Second closed-bid auction. To June 30.

Recent Openings

MICHEL GLOECKNER—World House Galleries, 987 Madison Avenue. Paintings. To June 30.

HOZAN MATSUMOTO—Japan Society, 250 Park Avenue. Paintings. To June 30.

SCULPTURE HOUSE GALLERY, 38 East 30th Street. Ceramics '66. To July 2.

OUT OF TOWN

Long Island

EAST HAMPTON GALLERY, 52 Main Street, East Hampton. Multiples in Op. Opens Saturday. To July 1.

STEPHEN RONAY—Vera Lazuk Gallery, Main Street, Cold Spring Harbor. Paintings. To July 9.

BURGOS GALLERIES, 8 Jobs Lane, Southampton. Work by Michael Juene, Bernardino Toppi, Paul Maze, others.

AWIXA POND ART CENTER, 23 Fourth Avenue, Bay Shore. Lithographs. To July 17.

HARBOR GALLERY, 43 Main Street, Cold Spring Harbor. Annual Spring Group show. To July 2.

GUILD HALL, East Hampton. Annual Artists' Members' Exhibition. To July 6.

New York State

STORM KING ART CENTER, Old Pleasant Hill Road, Mountaintop. Prints Relating to the Hudson River and Its Environs. To June 24. Contemporary Japanese Prints. To June 26.

GALLERY ONE, Hillsdale. Gallery Group. To June 30.

MARI GALLERIES, Woodstock. Annual group. To June 30.

WOODSTOCK ARTISTS ASSOCIATION, Woodstock. Group show of drawings and sculpture. To June 30.

ART STUDENTS LEAGUE, Woodstock. Annual Instructors Show. To June 30.

EDWIN DICKINSON—Katonah Gallery, Katonah. To July 12.

New Jersey

HOBOKEN GALLERY, 7th Street, Hoboken. To July 12.