

Trova's well-polished men

By Jane H. Kay

Cambridge, Mass.

Ernest Trova casts modern man from a clay mold into a suit of impervious metal. This man is slick, shiny and anonymous. An armored dummy, the machine is his parent and the plating manufacturer his guardian. His name is "Falling Man."

Yet when the reticent creator of the best known visual symbol of contemporary man came to open his show at MIT's Hayden Gallery, he quietly disclaimed the mechanical links of the theoreticians.

"One of my foremost concerns is not to synthesize man with the machine," he insisted as the viewer peered round a roomful of man-shaped icons—the same model man set into wheels as an automobile's torso, strapped on a mattress about to launch into science-fiction skies, and standing or striding as mockups for a mechanical landscape or game.

'Like an allegory'

"It is something of a man falling," Trova continued; yet a man who never quite completes the fall. "They're all studies," he emphasized. "There's no final solution. It's somewhat like an allegory." And after the prefix "Study Falling Man" in all the titles comes specification: "Walking Man," "Car Man," "Standing Man With Sphere in Chest."

The much-described work of the St. Louis artist indeed invites verbal speculation, as much as he seems disinclined to add to it. Unlike today's minimal or nonfigurative art, his figure-directed studies combine the "bests" of both worlds — the ordered, decorative pattern of hard-edge schools and the contemplative quality of surrealist or figurative work of the past.

Lawrence Alloway, former curator of the Guggenheim Museum, writes in a thorough catalogue: "Derived from Leonardo's chart-like drawing of a man with arms outstretched in a circle, 'The Falling Man' is essentially a sign rather than an observation of a body in space, a code embodying a canon or proportion rather than a view."

Trova himself describes different portions of the environment of his falling men as "just part of the vocabulary of this particular theme." He refers the viewer to a forthcoming print project in which he'll rely on the words of a philosopher to utter his statement on the condition of modern man.

Earlier, Trova was painting De Kooning-like abstractions of man. "Maybe the paint-

ings were charts and maps," he says. In 1961, "I was doing assemblage and one assemblage was a Falling Man." Since that time, public attention has come in the form of critical approval from usually hostile ends of the art world, suggesting the showing of the "selection" offered by MIT.

Unfortunately, however, 20 years of earlier work (Trova first exhibited publicly at 19), are ignored in the offering assembled from the Pace Gallery (now in New York) and various collectors. We see here no suggestion of the earlier more ragged, less finished works than the depersonalized glossed work shown here.

Lavish materials

The present handsome (if stylistically limited) show reflects not only Trova's talents but the affluence of his support. All around one sees the effective juxtaposition of images, the articulate treatment of forms, the fine eye for both decoration and composition. But one cannot escape being rather awed by the costly lavishness of the materials—the massive brass form with its scooped out reverse impressions or other chrome . . . plated works, adding to the polished richness of the exhibition.

For, ironically, Trova's depiction of man falling . . . falling . . . falling . . . , are only made possible by contemporary man's rising . . . cresting . . . mounting interest in supporting the arts.

Super-heros in det

By Alan N. Bunce

"It's all a bit theatrical, isn't it?" asks Hugh Drummond as he glances casually around the Italian castle of the cultivated super-villain (Nigel Green) in "Deadlier Than the Male."

And theatrical it is, a fantasy blend of exoticism (pretty girl attendants from many nations) and automation (life-size metal chessmen that move on command). Such settings are de rigeur for showdowns between super-heros and master criminals in the line of detective spoofs, of which this slick, slight, mildly entertaining film is the latest example.

The twist here is that two comely girls (Elke Sommer and Sylvia Koscina) perform adroit murders for their greedy boss, an oil tycoon who meets competition by this direct means. The glamorous executioners wear costumes too scanty at times, and a