

killed by a police posse. She drives on to a man-made oasis clinging to the side of a desert cliff, where her boss is closing a deal to exploit a considerable stretch of Pacific Coast. Raw from the news of her late companion's execution (received on the car radio amid selections of the very best rock music), she rebels against the cupidity of American speculative real estate, and in the eye of her imagination sees the hanging garden blown to splinters and all its contents swirling through the sky in a slow-motion ballet of the artifacts of our Roman Empire. This closing effect is technically audacious and visually seductive. It is at least at the level of the most expert television commercial, and I was not certain whether Antonioni had unconsciously fallen under the spell of our virtuoso salesmanship or, as I hope, was writing the era's epitaph in its own vernacular.

Antonioni was helped with his script by two Americans, Fred Gardner and the playwright, Sam Shepard. They have enabled him to get all the details "right"; but I wonder whether, inadvertently, they may have prevented him from doing more than that. The film has the air of noting all the "significant" aspects of contemporary America that a couple of socially agitated natives would point out to a foreign visitor. I would have been more interested in Antonioni's uncoached view of us; he might have got some of the implications wrong, but he might also have produced spontaneous insights more stimulating than these playbacks of the prevailing assumptions.

It is so also of Frechette and Miss Halprin. They are "found" performers, chosen because they look so exactly like the composite image of our deracinated youth. In Europe, therefore, they may seem exciting personifications of what one hears about America, but I found that I nodded at them in instant recognition of their authenticity, and then waited for them to convert that into their own individualities. Unfortunately, the authenticity was all they had to offer (or all that Antonioni, not knowing them very well, could elicit from them), and their letter-perfect dialogue registered less as communication between a young couple than as a glossary of contemporary terms and assumptions. They are a handsome and appealing pair (and Miss Halprin, who is a dancer, moves extremely well), but they seemed to be modeling American youth, not acting their experience of it.

I very much liked the love scene, with the qualification that I am weary of erotic encounters on sandy, dusty, hot, jagged and otherwise inhospitable terrain. It may be a problem of age, but my head aches when I contemplate intercourse under such conditions. However,

as the boy and girl explore and absorb each other, the sterile landscape for a mirage of miles around becomes animated by rutting figures in twos, threes and still more complex permutations (these Dionysian mimes are members of the Open Theatre). The spectacle gives a seasoning of wit to the eroticism, and visualizes the pleasant conceit that a lusty pair of kids can make even the moonscape of the Mojave Desert throb with life. I doubt that anyone put that idea into Antonioni's head. I take it to be his rainbow sign for our current inundation of sterility.

American directors have recently begun to escape from the polluted present into a nostalgia for the crumminess of the recent past—*Bonnie and Clyde*, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, that kind of thing. *The Honeymoon Killers* is another of the sort, with the addition that it is made in the laconic, unvarnished, efficient B-picture style of an earlier day.

In black and white, with minimum sets, devoid of stars and photographed with an implacable directness, it goes about the business of describing how and why a pair of obsessed lovers murdered a string of gullible women for the meager profit involved. It is based on a real case; more important, it is devastatingly convincing. The man (Tony LoBianco) is a Spaniard of the most pathetically specious charm, who has been making a living by bilking lonely females through a fake lonely hearts club. Into his net one day falls an obese supervisor of nurses (Shirley Stoler), and the plot turns bloody from the bizarre but in context persuasive circumstance that the little stinker falls inescapably in love with his gross victim. She is much more intelligent than he (though he is more cunning), and she is as demanding in her passion as she had been tyrannical in the hospital wards. Whereas his old game had been to love them and fleece them, her jealousy turns it into love them, fleece them if possible, but in any case leave them dead.

It is horrible and there are no extenuating circumstances. LoBianco and Miss Stoler display the characters, and in the process their own persons, with a matter-of-fact honesty which is rare on the screen and particularly rare in crime stories, a basically sentimental genre. *The Honeymoon Killers* is a coroner's account of what happened, a report from the morgue, clammy. I think it is a film of unusual excellence because it so thoroughly exhausts its subject. One comes to understand, not only the lethal principals but each of their victims, with a thoroughness that is astonishing. The picture never seems to be working very hard, but every foot of it is packed with information, conveyed invariably in the

most efficient way. You feel as though you had been living in the hellish atmosphere for weeks.

If the picture were less complete, it would be valueless; who wants a partial view of second-rate monsters? But a complete insight into even the most depressing and deplorable of human beings becomes somehow an exemplary experience. I came from it with a feeling, not of affection, certainly, but of brotherhood for these besotted killers. It is an achievement of real stature by LoBianco and Miss Stoler, and by Leonard Kastle, who directed them. □

ART

LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

The Museum of Modern Art has started opening on Monday (from 12 to 9 P M) which is unusual, and admission is free on that day, also unusual. The notion is that there are "students, artists, groups and individuals from community centers, and retired senior citizens" who have been barred by the \$1.50 admission charge. The museum yielded to the pressure of the Art Workers Coalition, one of whose demands this was. Another coalition project is an open letter to Picasso suggesting that he remove "Guernica," which hangs in the museum but is still owned by the artist. "Renew the outcry of 'Guernica' by telling those who remain silent in the face of My Lai that you remove from them the moral trust as guardians of your painting." If Picasso complies, the AWC will have again succeeded in embarrassing the museum; if he does not the organization will have a new and newsworthy target. (Picasso refused to protest the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising, and now the question is whether or not his communism is of the sort to force him to protest My Lai by initiating an artistic scandal.)

The coalition is the main form by which current protest enters the art world, but it is not the only one. At Museum (729 Broadway) a group of women artists are showing as "X-12." A manifesto explains: "X is exploration. X is crossed out, disposed of, as we have been for so many centuries. X marks the spot. This is where it is at." The language should prepare you exactly for the show, which has an overwhelming effect of fervor. The fervor is not for art, but for the social and instrumental uses to which it can be put. Characteristic works are big cutout caricatures, assemblages of environmental medievalism or of claustrophobic cabinet-scale,

and bloodied bits of store mannequins in a heap on the floor. Intensity of assertion is art's function for most of these artists, so that clumsiness or perverseness takes on primitivistic merit. Compared to the technology of the establishment, convulsively hand-crafted objects acquire an expressive function. A naive sense of the sacred or the conviction of mission insists that this work is more passionate and more efficient than well-made sophisticated art. Even its grossness symbolizes the motive of dissent.

At Gain Ground, a studio for experimental exhibitions at 246 West 80 Street, on the corner of Broadway (open Friday-Sunday, 11 to 5 P.M.), Eleanor Antin

is showing a series of portraits. This is art by a woman without any of the contextual rhetoric of "X-12," and with a far sharper sense of art's resources, although her medium is untransformed objects. Each portrait, consisting of a few things in proximity, is named for a real or imagined person. "Blaise" is real, her son; this portrait consists of a yellow toy car and a trailer with a yellow pencil on the floor; "Señor Mesa," a piece of family mythology by the sound of it, unites a red plastic chair, a bathrobe and a shaving brush. "Harold Beard" alludes perhaps to Harold Cohen, a colleague of Mrs. Antin's husband; at any rate camouflaged overalls, hanging on a hat stand, with decoy ducks scattered on the floor, evoke a human scale. Despite the newness of the objects and their unfettered placing, they become tokens of the human presence and, more precisely, witty characterizations of inferred subjects.

At the Museum of Modern Art an exhibition called "Spaces" gave artists a chance to work environmentally, and the museum undertook to get the cooperation of the industries necessary to provide material for large-scale work. In a show like this, in which the works do not exist until they are built, everything depends on the casting and performances of the artists. Jennifer Licht, who arranged the show, reveals bad judgment at several points and this was, unfortunately, compounded by bad luck. Three of the artists were well chosen: Dan Flavin, Robert Morris and Larry Bell. Flavin has a room lit by two differently sized and colored fluorescent fences; Robert Morris has a quirky miniature indoor landscape that looks like a Marienbad-kit from Creative Playthings; and Bell, who seemed a good choice, has come up with a dim, cavernous bore. It is as dull as the room of another West Coast choice, Michael Asher, of whom the catalogue observes truly that he "reduces visual evidence to such a degree that the room can be characterized as a void." F. E. Walther has a schedule of appearances at the museum when he can be observed at play on and among various mats (lying on the ground when I was there). Pula (a group of seven "researchers in programmed environments") has scattered in the museum garden strobe lights, speakers and heaters which react to ambient stimuli. The pattern of on-and-off is neither arbitrarily insistent enough nor stable and continuous enough, to amount to much. It all adds up to a slight increase in the garden's clutter.

One of the difficulties facing artists who attempt environmental projects is obtaining the materials. With great good

THIS WORLD, THIS GROWING LIGHT

*What has this roundness of the world
Been trying to say, all day?
I put my hand
As a glass, a mirror,
To the rabbits, the light, the openness,
Shake my head a little to hear right,
Feel only the blackness that is the
Back of the mirror, at day's end.*

David Ray

will the Museum of Modern Art set out to ease the procurement problem and the catalogue lists twenty-odd companies which supplied strobe lights, trees, acoustical materials, and all that. A second difficulty is using the materials when you have them and at this point "Spaces" bombed; the artists, except for Flavin and Morris, could not handle hardware on this scale.

Robert Morris, in another show at Castelli, is into graphics now with "Earth Projects," a set of ten lithographs in an edition of 125. They are restrained and precise works, printed on graph paper, in pale green, yellow and blue, landscape colors, that is to say. The landscape is presented in contour maps and cross sections, with detailed layouts of Morris' projected structures. The lithographs, in their cartographic and diagrammatic form, are highly elegant projects for works to be done in the open. The projects resemble formal garden designs, but turn into assault courses upon inspection: jet engines in the ground creating dust storms, steam issuing from buried conduits, a "vibrating concrete slab" just below ground, and burning petroleum on the surface of a river. Morris' intention in terms of scale, he has written in the prospectus for the suite, is to make something that is bigger than an object but not purely environmental, since its boundaries would be partially evident, like an Indian mound or an orchard, say.

Morris has taken Missouri as the site for these proposals (he was born there) because the landscape is "varied and not extreme. I think of all of the projects being situated within a not overly dramatic setting." His work in "Spaces" has connections with the "Hedges and Gravel" lithograph, in which a highly regular planting, à la Sir Thomas Browne, is set down on an irregular plane. What is needed is not room-size versions of these projects, however, but full-scale realization: they are feasible, but expensive. Perhaps it is for the support of projects of this nature, rather than in the boosting of exhibition budgets, that industrial funds might be sought. □

PERSONALS

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