

# Venice, Anyone?

By GRACE GLUECK

THE Tintoretto canvases are buckling at the Scuola San Rocco. Mold grows on murals in San Martino di Castello. And the Gothic sculptures in the Church of the Frari have been reshaped by bird droppings.

Name what brings trouble to works of art, and Venice has it — floods, humidity, salinity, atmospheric pollution and pigeons. Each year, thanks to such spoilers, the museum city on the Adriatic loses 6 per cent of its marble works, 5 per cent of its frescoes, 5 per cent of its paintings on canvas and wood. In fact, says Prof. Francesco Valcanover, Venice's Superintendent of Galleries, "if we don't hurry, by 1974 the city will have lost 60 per cent of its artistic treasures."

What's happening to Venice's art reflects the problems of the imperilled city itself, sinking into the sea at the rate of nearly an inch a year. The Italian government and other agencies are pondering urbanistic and structural solutions, but there's been no organized effort to save the 10,000 artistic monuments (carefully counted in a recent masterpiece census conducted by UNESCO).

An estimated \$50-million is needed for the art preservation-restoration task, and the forecast is that if immediate action isn't taken, there'll be little of value left when and if engineers succeed in reclaiming Venice from the sea. The prospect has seemed even gloomier now that the short-term Committee to Rescue Italian Art (CRIA), formed after the floods that hit Italy in 1966, is no longer actively seeking funds.

But new help is in sight. A Venice Committee has been formed by the International Fund for Monuments, a New York-based org that watches over monuments throughout the world (it has extensive projects on Easter Island and in Ethiopia). Composed of scholars and philanthropists (among them, art historians John McAndrew and Sydney Freedberg; Count Alessandro Marcello, director of Venice's Institute of Science, Letters and Arts; design critic Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., and Dr. Edmundo Lassalle, chairman of the I.F.M.), the Committee will undertake to raise funds internationally for a "vigorous restoration and preservation program," in conjunction with UNESCO and Italian authorities.

Its first project: rescue of Tintoretto's great 16th-century Scuola di San Rocco canvases, now in dire straits. The job, which will take conservators from two to three years, is estimated at \$100,000. The Committee, which welcomes donations, may be reached in care of the I.F.M., 15 Gramercy Park, N.Y. 10003.

## UP FOR GRABS

"What's Happening at the Gallery of Modern Art?" queries a flyer listing new exhibitions at Huntington Hart-

ford's white marble mah jong tile on Columbus Circle.

What indeed? The museum, built in 1964 at a cost of \$7-odd million, has stepped down its pace in the last few years, reportedly because of increased financial pressure on its mayvin-ly proprietor. (A \$4-million mortgage on the building requires some \$385,000 a year in interest and amortization.)

But in the last six months, the Gallery's pulse has begun to flutter again. Its revved-up exhibition program may not be New York's most exciting — Sir Jacob Epstein, Grandma Moses, a Canadian painter named Philip Aziz nominated by this newspaper's art critic, John Canaday for the title of "world's worst artist" — but never mind. While there's life, they say, there's hope.

The sponsor behind the new activities—which also include films, poetry readings, lectures, concerts and religious talks — is Fairleigh Dickinson University, a mushrooming, multi-part institution that boasts four New Jersey campuses and one in England. And taking personal charge of the Columbus Circle operation is none other than Dr. Peter Sammartino, the university's founder and present chancellor.

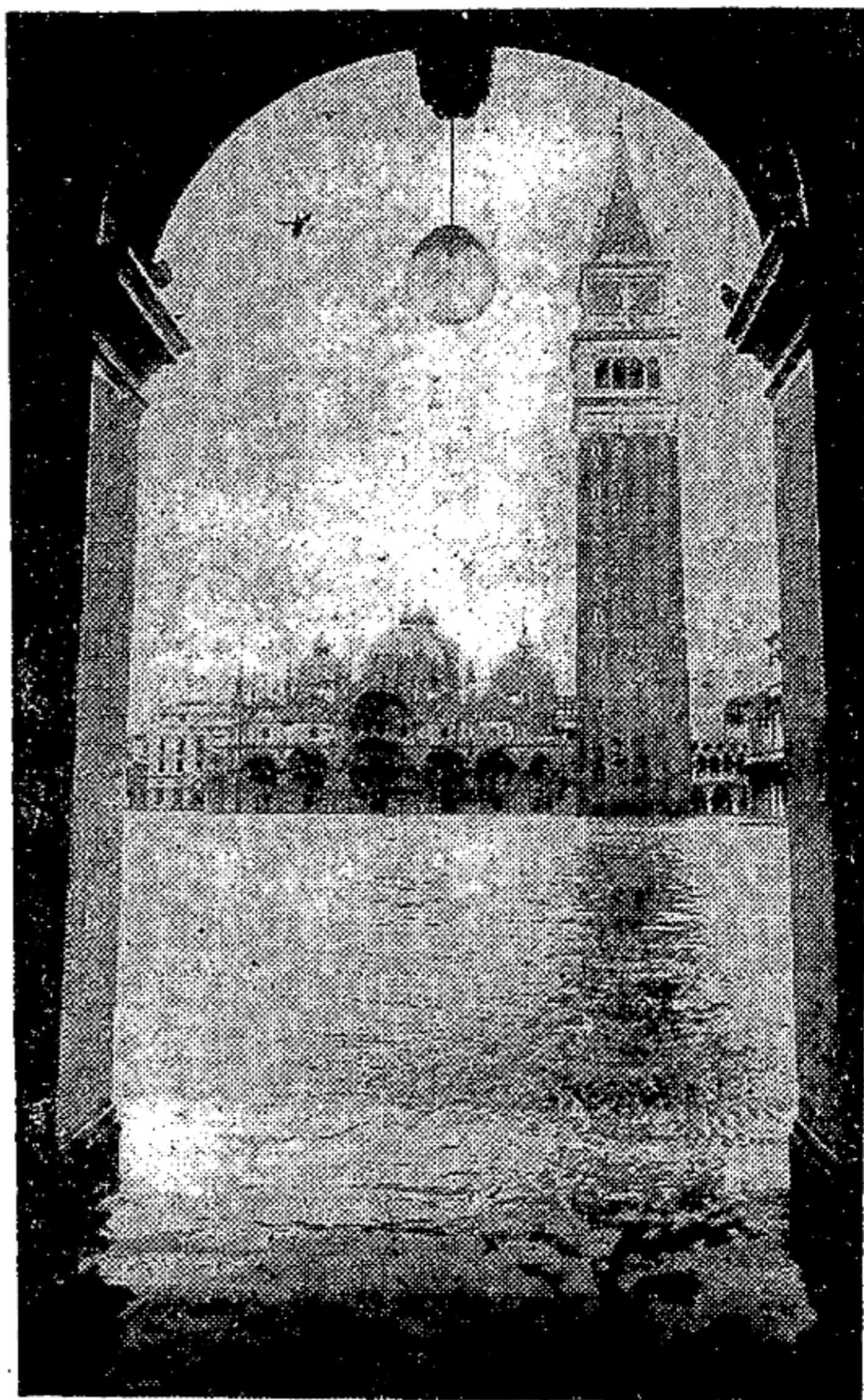
Fairleigh Dickinson is apparently interested in acquiring the Gallery, up for grabs for several years. But it has not yet found the wherewithal. "There have been informal talks but no definite agreement," says Dr. Sammartino, an art lover. "Meanwhile, it's made sense for me to gamble and put my energies into it. I have fun doing it, and even if things don't go, there's a residue for the university, because some of these shows can go to it from the gallery."

Meanwhile, back at Fairleigh's art-less campuses, there are reports of grumbling among students and faculty members, who are said to feel that the moderately-endowed university has other priorities.

## NEBULIST

You may not be aware of it, but there's a world-wide art show going on right now, called "One Month." It's made up of such ephemeral manifestations (one for each day in March) as (a) the release of two cubic feet of helium into the atmosphere (done on March 5 in the Mojave Desert by imperceptible-ist Robert Barry); (b) the 24-hour placement on a Manhattan rooftop of a piece of chemical filter paper for "whatever accumulates" (accomplished March 13 by constructionist Alex Hay); (c) yesterday's dusk-to-darkness burning of a huge bonfire set by Robert Huot at Staten Island's Oakwood Beach; (d) the tossing (on March 30) of an object from one country into another by Lawrence Weiner (probably from Amsterdam).

The show, commemorated by an unillustrated, 31-page



Venice's flooded Piazza di San Marco, 1966  
Rain, pigeons and other art spoilers

catalogue, was hatched by Seth Siegelau, a N.Y. dealer in art ephemera. In January, Siegelau wrote to 31 artists, asking each to contribute a "work" of 24 hours' duration, on an assigned date in March. A number forgot to respond, which accounts for some blank dates (tomorrow, for instance). And some simply sent their thoughts. Today's event, for example, is a set of propositions by Steve Kaltenbach, beginning with "Every art expression has an effect."

Whatever they sent is OK by Siegelau, who feels it's "of no consequence" whether the work is actually done. "What the show is about is the artists' response to my letter," he reports.

## ROOM AND VIEW

Space, a commodity of which New York artists face a spectacular dearth, is not so easy to come by in London either. So Space, Ltd., a new artists' cooperative, has been greeted with fanfare in the Swinging City. Launched by, among others, the painters Peter Sedgely and Bridget Riley, with the support of Henry Moore and the Tate Gallery's director, Norman Reid, the budding outfit has secured the use of a 19th-century warehouse on St. Katherine Docks, boasting four football-field floors.

The non-profit project, which may be ready for occupancy this spring, will offer studios for at least 50 artists, who'll pay a Utopian annual fee of 60c per square foot. It's hoped there'll also be a canteen, offices, and an artists' supply depot.

Qualifying artists will be selected by an advisory committee—but the hope is, notes Sunday Telegraph critic Edwin Mullins, that the

project will avoid the "safe establishment" taint to become instead "a kind of artists' kibbutz." The Docks scheme is also exciting, its been noted, for the potential it offers artists as a showcase outside the galleries, for exhibition of work hot off the drawing board.

## COLLAGE

Ho hum! March has another designation — Youth Art Month, declared by the New York State Art Teachers Association, in conjunction with the National Art Education Association and the Crayon, Water Color and Craft Institute . . . Archbishop Terence J. Cooke, who among other offices is a member of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, has been elected a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art . . . And speaking of violence, a melee caused by N.Y.U. students, aided by outside friends, brought out police at the opening of the Lila Katzen/Stephen Edlich exhibition at N.Y.U.'s Loeb Student Center March 6, closed the show down for several days. Too many students apparently tried to enter the show at once and, when denied admission en masse, became an angry mob . . . An "Art/Peace Event" at the New York Shakespeare Festival Public Theater, 425 Lafayette St., offers some 275 works by nearly 250 artists, at prices from \$1,000 down. Sponsored by the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, it will run through May 4, accompanied this month by a series of Monday-night panel discussions, "Issues in Art." Money raised will finance Easter weekend "Peace Parades" in seven U.S. cities.