

Out Is In on Columbus Circle

By GRACE GLUECK

CAN the New York Cultural Center, the confused young art gallery on Columbus Circle founded by Huntington Hartford and now run by Fairleigh Dickinson University, find itself at last as a Mature Museum?

Yes indeed, asserts Mario Amaya, its clever new director, who sees the center's role as that of a gadfly, or gnat. "One that bites people to re-think their preformed opinions. I'm against the cliché New York museum idea of what's in. Even when run by Hartford, the center was always against the taste of its time, and also ahead of it. We're New York's youngest and we have no political prejudices, no hang-ups from the past. We have an empty building, no collection—and we should try to do things that other museums can't or won't."

To begin with, Amaya admires the center (once described as a Mah Jongg tile supported by lollipops) as an edifice. "It's a kind of folly building, with a built-in elegance and grandeur. But you can't put in shows that don't belong there, such as conceptual art. That needs flexible space and those rigid, salon-type galleries just don't work. Besides, it's been done so much better elsewhere."

Well, then? Amaya, fresh from a three-year stint as chief curator of the Art Gallery of Ontario, deals out a pack of ideas. "Educational shows for one, given our association with Fairleigh Dickinson, like the current 'Persian Art After Islam.' Objets d'art, say works by Fabergé or Cartier's jewelry of the 1920's and '30's. Reinstate the 'Good Design' shows that MOMA used to stage, 100 great objects to buy for under \$100. Borrow from galleries outside New York their treasures. [In the fall, the center will bring 100 masterpieces from the Art Gallery of Ontario during that museum's rebuilding.] Call attention to neglected New York museums, like the Museum of the American Indian, by showcasing objects from them."

He'd also like to revamp the center's film program ("People are getting bored with campy old movies"); beef up its musical series, and make more use of the Bijou basement theater (last week, initiating a continuing series of drama presentations, the center staged its first live theater, two plays by Leonard Melfi. Amaya would like to make it an uptown headquarters for Off Off Broadway). And he has plans for substituting a more down-to-earth cafe for the exotic

Polynesian eatery on the ninth floor.

Amaya, 33, comes from Brooklyn but acquired his British accent during a 12-year stay in England as a writer, critic and editor (he founded the monthly, Art and Artists). He's the author of books on Tiffany glass, Art Nouveau and Pop Art, and several years ago got into the public eye when, visiting Andy Warhol's studio, he was creased by a bullet from the same gun that almost killed Andy.

And now, back to the center, which next month will open a summer loan show, "New York Collects: Anonymously and Distinctively." It will comprise works from four anonymous New York collections that Amaya promises, eschew the usual Renoirs and Monets. Instead, canvases by the unfashionable American realists Paul Cadmus, Jared French, John Koch, and such French academics as Gerôme, Cabanel and Bouguereau. Well, as they say downtown, *plus ça change...*

SAGA

Here's another episode in the dramatic daytime serial of Knoedler's, the prestigious art gallery on East 70th that fell on hard times and was taken over last fall by West Coast art patron Armand Hammer in partnership with New York dealer Bernard Danenberg.

At the time, the gallery was threatened with the loss of most of its contemporary stable, including Willem de Kooning, Henry Moore and Tony Smith. Shortly after the takeover, three star staff members from the old regime departed — Anthony Bower, Xavier Fourcade and Donald Droll (the first to open his own dealership, the latter two to work as partners). And soon after that, dealer Danenberg bowed out, for reasons still unexplained.

Now comes word that the Hammer interests, which retain control, are taking the first of a series of steps to re-establish Knoedler's as an art world Power. They have appointed as vice president and director of the contemporary artists department John P. Richardson, writer, lecturer, exhibition organizer and for the last seven years American representative of Christie's, the London auction house.

"We're eager for Knoedler's to continue representing the best contemporary artists," says Roland Balay, who's remained as president through thick and thin. "We'll also continue as a leader in the field of impressionists, old masters and American paintings."

The London-born Richardson, 48 and the author of books on Manet, Picasso and Braque, says he's "totally optimistic" about Knoedler's future.

COMMISSAIRE-PRISEUR

Who should pop into town the other day but Maître Jean-Claude Binoche, at 29 the youngest art auctioneer

ship, he was admitted to the society of *commissaire-priseurs*, a closed group of auctioneers that sells seats to members as does the Stock Exchange.

Binoche believes that the French, not normally known as art buyers (and never of non-French work), are beginning to get into the market, "particularly the younger ones. The French are beginning to realize that one can be a good painter without being 'Parisian,'" says Binoche, who believes there's a \$2-million-a-year market for current art in Paris. "They have a tendency to fixed ideas, but when they modify their opinions they do it thoroughly."

REPARATIONS

"That's a lot of relatives," cracked an art worldling, when told that two million ants had died during a show at Automation House last March. But to Alan Sonfist, an artist who works with natural phenomena, the mass Formicide was far from amusing. With an ant specialist, he'd gone to the jungle of Panama to find the creatures, and painstakingly brought them back here to exhibit as a study in patterns and structures. The soldier-like insects, known as army ants, were displayed in a large enclosure at Automation House, and fulfilled their function by marching in geometric designs to get at food strategically placed by the artist.

The show attracted national attention, but within two weeks after their arrival at Automation House, the ants were dead, slain by a malfunction of the heating system, which failed to keep the temperature at the required 72 degrees.

Sonfist brooded, then announced he would sue Automation House, run by the American Foundation on Automation and Unemployment, whose president is the lawyer and labor mediator, Theodore Kheel. Compensation? Nothing could compensate for the ants' death, Sonfist said, sadly. What he really wanted was an acknowledgment of Automation House's neglect.

Last week Kheel, who arranged for the show in the first place, wrote Sonfist a letter establishing that the ants had died when the automatically controlled heating system went off over a weekend. And he invited Sonfist to submit other ideas for consideration. Mollified, the artist said he might give the House a crack at his next project, the selection of real, live elements from a countryside, made in just the way an artist would select them by eye in painting a landscape.



Met Newman
Mario Amaya, director,
New York Cultural Center.
A pack of ideas

in Paris, and the first to sell contemporary art. Round, rosy-cheeked and red-haired, Maître Binoche (French auctioneers, who must serve an apprenticeship and pass a rigorous exam, are called "Master") announced that he had bagged for auction in Paris May 29—tomorrow—a collection of 75 *tableaux*, owned by a mysterious Monsieur X of Switzerland. The sale includes works by Bacon, Morandi, Cornell, Lindner, Dubuffet, Dali and Wesselmann.

So? Well, contemporary art auctions just don't happen that often in Paris, the last one having been a sale that Binoche himself staged last December. "For the first time a big auction normally Anglo-Saxon is escaping Anglo-Saxons by coming to Paris," Binoche said, happily.

Binoche really began his auction career when at 16 he bought in Paris a piece of Japanese pottery for \$4. "I soon found it was not Japanese, but French art deco, and as a French work I sold it for \$120," he recalls. "So to make pocket money, I became a dealer. I would buy at auctions at the Hôtel Drouot, and sell to a clientele I developed." Later, after a three-year apprentice-

NY Times
May 28, 1972
(closed in 1975)