

Other Scenes

John Wilcock

1968

VENICE—Most of the art freaks who came to Venice for the June Biennale arrived in an ambivalent frame of mind. They were revolutionaries weren't they? don't all artists and dealers consider themselves revolutionaries?—and so they understood why the Italian students protested the Biennale as a symbol of the Italian cultural establishment. Well, didn't they?

Most of them, of course, did, but 'there were other factors at stake. Like hundred thousand dollar investments, for example. The students, after a series of angry meetings in the "liberated" Academy beside the Grand Canal made an issue out of the police protection (there on direct orders from Rome, the rumors said): VENICE IS SICK WITH CAPITALISM, their signs read, and: THE BIGGEST ROOM IS RESERVED FOR THE POLICE.

But it was only this protection that, in the eyes of some of the exhibitors & their dealers, guaranteed the safety of the works. The French artist Arman, for example, welcomed the police presence and flatly refused to withdraw his work from exhibit in the French pavilion—unlike his colleagues Kowalski, Schoffer, & Dewasne, and numerous Italian artists who covered their works with brown paper or cloth.

Swedish artists Arne Jones, Sivert Lindblom and Olle Granett announced: "Under the conditions present at the Biennale we don't want to open our exhibit". The Russian pavilion also remained closed.

The U.S. pavilion opened on schedule, its unbelievably square exhibit quickly proving the laughing stock of the Biennale. Some jerks from Nebraska picked this year's painters and if this sounds like big city snobbery it's meant to. For a major country to be represented by the taste of some Mid-western hick is little more than a farce; even if the country wasn't already undergoing violent, revolutionary- upheavals, in art as in everything else.

All in all, this year's show was a major letdown with few new ideas and excessive security cancelling most of the usual gatherings and parties. In but three days, I managed to be refused admission to parties given by the British, Canadian and U.S. embassies—all of which had seen -the special issue of Other Scenes prepared for the occasion. I must be doing something right.

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