

SCULPTURE IN METAL

Recent Work by Roszak—

Diverse Painting

By **STUART PRESTON**

FOR many reasons abstract sculpture is not as familiar to the public as abstract painting. This is a pity, for, in some ways, sculpture is really more suitable for the embodiment of certain abstract ideas than painting. It is arguable that the sculptor, being given a third dimension ready made, has an easier time of it in dealing with forms whose meaning is enhanced by being looked at from many different angles. An individual brief for this case is the brilliant achievement of Theodore Roszak, whose latest work is on view at the Pierre Matisse Gallery.

The violence of their tortured forms; the expressionist handling of the surfaces, and the emphatic strength of the medium—hard metals chipped, crunched and kneaded—give these sculptures maximum solidity in space. The forms are not at all "pure." Romantic or poetic meanings can easily be read into them. They might be monstrous prehistoric crustacea preserved for all time in a sheath of bronze, steel and copper. Or they might represent a horrendous dance of death caught in an eruption of metal. They are far from soliciting admiration for prettiness.

Such convulsions might overwhelm a lesser artist. But Roszak does not allow himself to be distracted from his main job, the controlling of the central movement of his forms. Without this, his brilliant modeling and his surface enrichments would become senseless.

SYMBOLS: According to Lincoln Kirstein, the choragus of today's magic realist painters, their pictures "represent a search for symbols rather than a display of esthetic devices." In Kenneth Davies' trompe l'oeil paintings, at the Edwin Hewitt Gallery, this search has turned up a host of objects whose symbolical message is to be looked for in the provocativeness of their odd association on a single canvas. By themselves they are clean, minutely realized pieces of craftsmanship. Davies' work suffers from undue slickness and from a certain hardness in the colors, but his technique can hold its own with that of any painter who has ever tried to fool the eye.

The trouble starts when you try to decipher the message. For, in the lavish parade of symbols, meaning somehow escapes. Means are so insisted upon that ends become swamped.

VERMONT: Two things are made clear in Sanford Ross' exhibition of oils and water-colors at Van Diemen-Lilienfeld's. He is deeply attached to the Vermont countryside and he depicts it with a reticent realism that springs from his feelings. It takes time for the cold light to unfold the subtle pictorial values in worn farm buildings and in the succession of smooth, folded hills. Ross is an artist who reaps solid pictorial rewards from the long contemplation required. He has an eye for what makes a firmly constructed design; he accounts for the degradations of local color under a gray sky; and he feels the slumbering vitality in leafless trees, transforming that in "November Farm" into a Medusa head of writhing branches.

ELEGIAC: With a large selection of paintings, drawings and prints at Associated American Artists, Frank Kleinholz presents a somewhat moody report on a two-year stay in Paris. In these dark and sensitively colored canvases he infuses the niceties of objective truth with a personal melancholy, producing genuinely touching results, especially when dealing with figures. It may not be everybody's Paris, but who is to prevent the artist from painting it as he sees it and feels it? Selection and emphasis must always be his first problems before a given scene, and in these intense little glimpses Kleinholz has expressed his own vision in ways that will undoubtedly appeal to others.

VISIONS: The new John Heller Gallery, 108 East 57th Street, opens its doors with an exhibition of paintings by Nahum Tschacbasov. He is above all an experimental artist, fond of the multiple image and of the juxtaposition of abstract and realistic passages, pictorial devices that give his canvases great surface animation. Nor do his experiments stop with styles. He must be one of the first artists to paint in plastic, a medium with the consistency of glue or sealing wax. And as one slightly macabre expedient he adorns a head with actual human hair, embedding it in the transparent plastic like a fly in amber. There is a spirit of wild wistfulness here, akin to Chagall's. Color is obtrusively strong, and the effects he creates are rich, strange, and not exempt from pictorial vulgarity.

POETIC: Adele Brandwen's charmingly contrived paintings at the American British Gallery are less strong than they are sweet. Curtains flutter in an empty room; flowers pile high in dreamy bouquets; an old Frenchman contemplates a fish-pond. Nothing much happens, but we are put in touch with a world of agreeable fancifulness. It is all a little vague but this vagueness does not affect the discreetly planned designs, and it is happily matched in the pearly colors that give off a muffled glow.