

## Exotics under the civic elms

IT IS nearly 20 years since the London County Council held its first open air exhibition of sculpture in Battersea Park. Success made it a triennial event—one that has been widely imitated. It has never fallen into a formula, as many mixed shows do. It has varied in make-up and emphasis, and even wandered off briefly to Holland Park. Now it is at home in the giant tree-guarded sanctuary by the lake in Battersea. But the wind of change has blown over the well-groomed lawns leaving a scattering of altogether new-style objects. This is very much a show of the sixties.

This year—apart from a single memorial piece by David Smith, who died last year—it is all British. There are 28 sculptors, half of them under 40 and several still in their twenties, selected by Alan Bowness. The cleavage between the generations is vivid and indeed refreshing. The show is dominated by three massive pieces by Henry Moore, monumental chunks of dully gleaming bronze, which lie here as calmly as a pride of lions. Once again we are reminded of the astonishing fact that London is still—apart from a hundred yards away—without a single example of our universally acclaimed master shown as he likes to be shown, in the changing light and challenging spaces of the open air. One of the figure pieces should be bought and left just where it is, for ever.

### ART NIGEL GOSLING

Near them, and looking equally at home, are three good Hepworth pieces. They have an enviable site. Through their hollows the lake stretches away while geese and coots crouch in their shadow reflecting the living curves. Kenneth Armitage occupies a steep and awkward hillock with three pieces which have taken on the unlucky look of a public address system. McWilliam has a polished bronze emblem a bit like a film trophy. Bernard Meadows, Ralph Brown and Hubert Dalwood are exploring surrealist figures and shapes, and Elizabeth Frink shows a little queue of heads.

These are the middle group—not so pastorally minded as their seniors, but still possible outdoor types. The contrast between them and the "new generation" is total. The gaudily coloured assemblages of metal and plastic which lie dotted about over the far side of the turf speak a young language surely founded on metropolitan values, economic security and mechanisation. They are mostly modest in scale, and light and spare in weight and mass. From some angles they have a beauty of almost Chinese delicacy, like brilliant birds in some green forest.

But, as Bowness remarks in the

catalogue, open-air presentation is by no means ideal for them. Some of the colours have a bad time with the municipal rhododendrons, and several sculptures I have admired in a gallery seem to shrink here to something like a garden ornament, a piece of playground furniture, or even an echo of the neighbouring funfair. Leaves and dirt mar their immaculate surfaces, imperfections of manufacture show up in the bright light, and the refined intellectual calculation which lies behind many of them turns to brittleness.

Yet there is no gainsaying the alertness and vitality of the best pieces. Caro has judged his colours well. Wall's black steel preserves its integrity. King's exhibit has a fascinatingly complex simplicity. David Hall's white, folded plates look oddly right. A practised eye will discern in many others the lively invention which is running through our sculpture studios and which makes this a show of absorbing interest. But I would like to see them next time in an architectural setting.

In case this sounds off-putting, it should be added that the mixture of these exotic structures scattered over the grass under the elbows of the huge elms among their more sober companions is one of the most exhilarating sights in London. Wait for the sunshine if you can—the colours and the shadows will repay you tenfold.

The field of young sculptors is extraordinarily wide at the moment. Here are two, not included in the

G.L.C. show at Battersea, with one-man shows in the West End:—*Hanover*.—John Wragg's new sculpture is in cast aluminium but suggests forms originating in more flexible materials. An uneven show, ranging from the ultra-simple confrontation of two bent rods, via a variety of rather awkward totemistic shapes which somehow just lack vital presence, to striking pieces such as "Opus" in which a fluid base opens naturally into graceful articulated stems. These, and a few small, well-made pieces, make this Brancusi-inspired collection very rewarding.

*Drian*.—Laurence Burt made his name with powerful images welded in metal, a material of which he clearly had a close understanding. Then he disconcertingly appeared in a mixed show with some vaguely Pop-art pieces. His new show consists of assemblages of symbols in the Nouveau Réaliste style. The use of metal now seems purely arbitrary and the images are too diffuse to make their point—literary allusion needs tight formal control. But you can feel a genuine inquiring mind, and here and there are imaginative units with a real punch.

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*New Art Centre*.—Keith Grant seems to be kinky about volcanoes, and has found a rich subject in the newly-erupted island of Surtsey. Its jagged thrusting rhythms seem to compose into paint best when they are controlled in the small gouaches; elsewhere the temptation towards picture-making rears its ugly head.

## Gosling On Battersea Park

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