

Chicago's Navy Pier Exhibition

Warren Sanderson

Volume 27, Number 108, Fall 1982

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/54431ac>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (print)

1923-3183 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Sanderson, W. (1982). Chicago's Navy Pier Exhibition. *Vie des arts*, 27(108), 93–94.

colours that he also used to describe impressions of trees (*Spring*, 1962) and sky (*Autumn Sky*, 1964). The resultant abstractions herald the maturity of a colourist's art. *Summer Skies* (1966) radiates amorphous striations in yellow-flecked blues from the bottom line. Only the artificially painted frame contains the rippling currents of colour. Eccentrically arranged rivulets of brilliant reds, blues, and yellows chart a dazzling rhythm on the choreographed surface of *Summer Blues* (1966). Iskowitz's fanciful, aerial cartography was confirmed for the artist during helicopter flights out of Churchill, Manitoba in 1967 and an exuberant confidence has characterized his memory-maps ever since. The monumental *Uplands* series (1970-1972) with its truncated leviathan forms floating improbably on a cushioned and indistinct horizon line suspends a gentle rhythm in bold and muted colours. In the *Uplands* paintings the few distinct forms float outside the gravitational pull. Later canvases intensify these same colour patches and catapult them with compelling velocity through a crowded and active gravitational field (*Newscape*, 1976) or attempt to constrain them with an over-painted and more neutral screen (*Night Greens D*, 1981). Iskowitz's recent memory is charged with the vibrancy of a bold and personal sense of colour.

If the exhibition is at all flawed, it is by that recurrent art historical imperative to demonstrate the emergence of an artist's style. The persuasive didactics of the Iskowitz retrospective, the rationalization of the work against post-modernist theory in the handsome catalogue², and even the sight lines created in the hanging of the show continually encourage the interpretation of each more recent work as a maturation of something only hinted at in its precedent. This inevitably evolutionary view can obscure the intrinsic merit of the individual work. And in an exhibition where the artist's early memory-scapes are as compelling as his recent landscapes are euphoric, each of Iskowitz's mind-maps charts its terrain with inherent conviction.

1. The exhibition, already shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, January 23-March 7, 1982, to the Art Gallery of Windsor, April 4-May 2; the Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montreal, May 20-June 27; the London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario, July 9-August 22, will also travel to the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, November 1-December 12, and Canada House, London, U.K., February 23-March 22, 1983.
2. Burnett, David. *Iskowitz*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1982.

CHICAGO'S NAVY PIER EXHIBITION

By Warren SANDERSON

Chicago's third Annual International Art Exposition held from the 13th through the 18th of May at the huge Navy Pier facility on Lake Michigan was a resounding success. More than a hundred galleries, mostly of contemporary art, exhibited under one roof for thousands of people who came to see and, surprisingly often in this year of economic distress, also to buy. In only three years the Chicago Navy Pier show has vaulted into the forefront of the art world, leapfrogging the efforts of New York, Toronto, and other cities, to rival Basel's annual art fair.

A great many of the major galleries of almost every region of the United States were represented, as we might have expected while, beyond that, no less than three from England, four from France, three from Italy, two from Spain and six from West Germany ensured an interna-

tional presence. Familiar to the readers of *Vie des Arts* were, to mention only a few, the Galerie Maeght (New York and Paris), Marlborough (London and New York) featuring Fernando Botero's strangely pneumatic, larger than life-sized sculptures, New York's Robert Miller Gallery with especially the brilliant still lifes of Janet Fish and of Alice Neel, André Emmerich Gallery (New York) with a concentration upon the sculpture of Michael Steiner, the Leo Castelli Gallery (New York) with a marvelous painting by Sandro Chia outstanding among many others, Sidney Janis Gallery (New York) with recent works in plaster and in paper by George Segal among some few others, the Annina Nosei Gallery (New York) presenting New Wave figural work, and Joan Prats-Poligrafa Editions, the distinguished Spanish publisher of contemporary prints. Less familiar but just as deserving of mention were John Berggruen (San Francisco) with an impressive array of California painters, including some small and precious but beautifully painted recent cityscapes by Wayne Thiebaud of Pop fame; Galerie Alain Blondel of Paris exhibiting outstanding realists from Europe (Jean-Yves Le Boulenger, Claude Yvel, and Francine Van Hove); Jane Haslem (Washington, D.C.) with some huge paintings of John Winslow and recent oils by Gabor Peterdi; and the Hokin Gallery of Chicago with striking trompe-l'oeil variations upon abstract expressionist paintings by John Havard and others.

To stroll along the several aisles of the Navy Pier show was in effect to experience art that cut across commercial and national boundaries. With few exceptions there was little of nationalism expressed in dealers' choices, but

3. Jean-Michel BASQUIAT
Rice and Chicken, 1982.
Acrylic and oil on canvas.
172 cm x 213.5.



for the regional representations of Texas and to a lesser extent California. But strolling hardly describes the often pressurized sense of elbow to elbow, slow-motion movement of the mid-day and evening crowds. This was as much a public event, a matter of civic pride, as it was a place for dealers and collectors of all tastes to gather and talk shop.

Chicago demonstrated amply that, whether we agree or disagree with it, the major worldwide trend today is of a resurgent re-assimilation and reinterpretation of the pathways of figuration taken earlier in this century. And given the broad geographic scope of this movement—no surprise in this age of mass media—the level of quality achieved by so many is much more consistently high than we might have anticipated.

Paintings by some of the leading new international lights attracted a good deal of attention. From West Germany Georg Baselitz's strongly painterly, richly impastoed, upside-down figural work commanded much respect: it was a bold excursion into the art of painting in which representation *per se* was directly denied, and yet almost literally one could hardly mistake the representation. A.R. Penck, apostle of the decidedly unintentional, yet somehow symbolist (?) New Wave, showed his gingerbread men and out-of-scale parts of objects arrayed seemingly haphazardly against an uninteresting ground. From Italy Sandro Chia's painting of a reclining figure upon a sofa was more solid than dreamlike and its figural mode evoked comparison with the less interesting Fernando Botero's portentous larger-than-life sculptures. Chia is unquestionably the star of what Italian critic Achille Bonito Oliva has called the Italian trans-avantgarde. Works of other members of that group, also worth time and contemplation, by artists such as Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, and Mimmo Paladino, were also seen in Chicago. (They and more are arrayed in the Guggenheim Museum's exhibition of *Italian Painting Today*.)

Annina Nosei Gallery, one of the brighter promises of New York's Soho section, showed paintings that followed those of the Europeans I have already mentioned. Salomé's *Crazy Red*, a large (94 1/2 x 79") loosely painterly figural work is related to Baselitz's mode, while Jean-Michel Basquiat's *Untitled* goes beyond A.R. Penck to verge deliberately upon the edge of a reappraisal of the CoBRA group of the early 50's and bad painting. This introduces some serious problems that proceed beyond the bounds of this review.

To single out particular realists for discussion here is less important than the recognition of their predominant presence throughout the Navy Pier exhibition halls. Suffice it to mention that in addition to the now frequently seen Americans such as Chuck Close, Janet Fish (Robert Miller Galleries, N.Y.), Gregory Gillespie (Forum, N.Y.), Philip Pearlstein (Frumkin/Struve, Chicago), and Sidney Goodman (Terry Dintenfass, N.Y.), the works of lesser known artists—Ben Mahmoud (Zaks Gallery, Chicago), Michael Mazur (Janus Gallery, Los Angeles) and Donald Roller Wilson (Moody Gallery, Houston, Texas), for instance—though diverse were extraordinarily well composed and well painted; while there was also some strong competition from European realists of various persuasions, artists such as Jean-

Yves Le Boulenger, Claude Yvel, Francine Van Hove—all presented by Galerie Alain Blondel, Paris—and Angelo Vadala (Galleria Berenson, Boca Raton and Florence). Trompe-l'œil realism was evident not only in figural work but also in very witty paintings that were based upon abstract expressionist modes: paint appears for instance to throw shadows upon the surface of the works of James Havard and consequently the impasto appears thick, or the paint itself seems to hover over sections of the surface. In addition to Havard (Hokin Gallery, Chicago), George Green and Michael Gallagher (both also exhibited by Hokin) work in a related idiom.

Minimal art and conceptual art apparently have all but departed the scene, to judge from Navy Pier, leaving most of the other international trends of the 60's and 70's for reconsideration at leisure. Noteworthy sculpture was less often encountered that painting and prints, as by now we have come to expect in such gatherings. But sculpture did range from the neo-Renaissance, silver-surfaced reinterpretations in relief of for example Francesco Laurana's 15th century classicism by Sergio Benvenuto (Galleria Berenson, Boca Raton, Florence) through some choice small works of Mark Di Suvero (Hansen, Fuller,

Goldene Gallery, San Francisco) to many basically constructivist-inspired wall pieces by David Barr (Donald Morris Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan) and Art Kleinman (Balkin Fine Arts, Chicago) and to various free-standing pieces of the ConStruct Inc. group of Chicago. Though small, the contingent of dealers in photography brought along some well-chosen images, represented for example by New York's Robert Frieden Gallery and Chicago's Allan Frumkin Photography.

After New York's Art Expo of late April and Toronto's international exhibition of early May, printmaking occupied a position of much lesser prominence at Chicago. Often the artists producing prints were painters who had turned to printmaking as a mass medium. Andy Warhol, a prominent printmaker almost from the outset during the 60's and whose prints were displayed at many booths, reversed this trend at least temporarily with a startlingly beautiful large acrylic in which ladies' shoes were composed in an heroic scale upon the canvas, yet in such a way as to encourage a sense of quiet and of luxurious relaxation. And Gabor Peterdi, known particularly for his sensitive and innovative prints, has again turned to large oils with recognizable im-

agery. Among the several outstanding recent prints available were some by Frank Stella that were often huge in scale while retaining their theatrical verve, many by Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Richard Diebenkorn, and Kenneth Noland's relatively small paired monotypes (exhibited at Gemini G.E.L.'s booth, among others). David Hockney's oversized two-colored lithographs were also memorable—but at a stiff \$4,000 and \$6,000 (US) price tag.

To complete this overview of the Chicago exhibition, mainstream art of the earlier twentieth century, particularly paintings, drawings, and small sculptures, was present in the booths of Galerie Linssen (Bonn), Galerie Folker Skullima (West Berlin), Maxwell Davidson (New York), and James Goodman Gallery (New York) among others; and in a special section of the exhibition halls there were drawings and prints of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The organizer's of this International Art Exposition at Chicago are to be warmly congratulated upon their highly successful efforts. And perhaps at the next Navy Pier show Canadian artists and Canadian galleries will also be appropriately well represented.

ART IN ARCHITECTURE FOR THE BUILDERS

Jeanne PARKIN and William J. S. BOYLE, *Art in Architecture—Art for the Built Environment in the Province of Ontario*. Visual Arts Ontario, 1982 (McClelland & Stewart (Canada) and Harper & Row (United States). 276 p.; Ill. black-on-white.

This important book of facts and information presents, explains and answers many questions that have never been easily dealt with, but are illuminated by recent experience. Though the documentation concentrates on the Province of Ontario, it will be of great interest to architects, artists, craftsmen, art consultants and urban planners everywhere in Canada.

Three main themes are covered: *Art in Architecture Case Studies* examines thirteen projects ranging from government buildings to university complexes, restaurants and re-development sites and includes, among others, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, the Toronto Transit Commission's Spadina Subway Art

project and the Toronto Eaton Centre. *Competitions, Contracts, Government Assistance* offers insight into crucial transactions which must be fully evaluated by both client and artist before and during their collaboration on a project. The third section *Index of Artists*, covers the broad range of artists competent to carry out commissions in the fields of sculpture, painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, installations, mixed media, environmental, fibre, glass, furniture, electric art and ceramic.

The criteria for selecting the artists included in the Index were based on the quality and originality of work. An open jury examined 300 applications and viewed 3000 slides, giving equal attention to new artists with fresh ideas and established professionals already well known.

Author Jeanne Parkin (art consultant and curator) and editor William J. S. Boyle (founding and executive director of Visual Arts Ontario) were assisted in their research by a committee of architects, artists, designers and art professionals.

Helen DUFFY



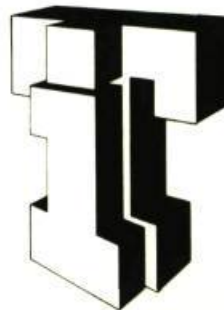
120 BARBADOS BLVD., UNIT 5-6
SCARBOROUGH, ONTARIO M1J 1L2
(416) 264-3356

Fabrique à la main des presses destinées à l'impression de la gravure et de la lithographie ainsi que fournitures pour la gravure



Makers of Hand-made Fine Etching and Lithographic Presses & PRINTMAKING SUPPLIES

PROMPTE LIVRAISON DES COMMANDES PAR LA POSTE
MAIL ORDERS PROMPTLY FILLED



Typographie
INNOVATION, Inc.

Téléphone:
(514) **849-1261**

400, rue Saint-Antoine Ouest, Montréal H2Y 1J9