



Adolph Gottlieb. *Azimuth*, 1965. Oil/canvas, 92 x 144". Lent by Marlborough-Gerson, New York.

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THE 1967 PITTSBURGH INTERNATIONAL

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Like all large museum shows selected to present a "cross-section survey of what's going on", the current "1967 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture" at the Carnegie Institute's Museum of Art is very much a hodge-podge affair, and gives off an air of confusion on first encounter. On entering the galleries of this year's International, one is confronted by so strong an evidence of rampant tastelessness, or abdication of taste, in the eclectic array of knick-knacks and gew-gaws, of slick, superficial or sadly weak paintings and sculptures, that one is at first inclined to despair of the whole endeavor. But then one discovers positioned here and there the four or five possible masterpieces (all of them badly hung), the occasional examples of good, traditional painting (looking back to, and leaning on achievements of the past rather than being considerable achievements in themselves) and the various other works concerning which one would commend the artist for his concern and struggle, if not for his result: finding this fairly substantial, if small minority of works that have something to say, *as art*, among the collection of toys and side-shows, finally makes one's visit worthwhile. In their presence, one is caught up into exaltation, or quietly pleased, or intrigued. . . . one forgets for the moment the surrounding circus of trivial *tableaux*, of perfunctorily performing machines, of innocuous play-things "to be re-arranged by the spectator".

Later, I discovered, happily, that the show held a little bit more: over and above the interest contained in and aroused by the few superlative or meritorious works, I began to glimpse on longer looking another aspect of the International that was, in its own way, fascinating and rewarding to study. This was the general comparison it offered between the art of three of the more heavily represented nations: the French, the English and the Americans. As well as giving a vestige of shape to the exhibition, this comparison seemed to me to have much to tell about the making of art in general, and about the state of art in our time. It, too, made the International worth seeing.

The four or five possible masterpieces? Speaking straight out like a bolt from the blue, asserting itself once again as an indisputably major work, and setting the standard for the whole exhibition, there was Kenneth Noland's *Horizontal Side* of 1966, the more difficult of his two long, horizontal paintings of four colored bands which had impressed me so much in last season's Corcoran Gallery of Art "Biennial Exhibition of American Painting". This resilient work, with its emphatic, excessive length and uncompromising color juxtapositions, made Larry Poons' large *Untitled* painting, good as it was (being the work of a promising young painter who has not yet reached his maturity), look like a soft piece of nougat.

Only a couple of quieter American paintings hung near it came close to the Noland in quality: Adolph Gottlieb's 1965 painting, *Azimuth*, with black discs and lines on two different whites (which I'd previously seen in New York and Boston—here, it was awkwardly installed over a heating grill that threatened to upset the careful, odd balance of its composition), and Jules Olitski's small *Private Hands* of 1966 (a chiefly mauve painting wretchedly hung on a beige partition that was lifted up off the floor). That these two works took longer to "come through" I put down as much to their unsympathetic installation as to their genuine "slowness" of character: the Noland much more easily overcame the distraction of the colored sculpture by Fletcher Benton (possibly a kinetic piece that wasn't working when I saw the show) that was placed next to it.

Much harder to forgive, in the installation, was the treatment accorded to Ellsworth Kelly's *Yellow Blue* of 1966 (a work that I found hard to "place", for it seemed to transcend in an indescribable way its own simple elegance), which had Len Lye's utterly superficial sculpture *Grass* wavering in front of it, and the "pretentious" of the Anthony Caro sculpture, *Atrey* of 1966 (with its splendidly "not-nice" proportions of thickness and length), by its placement on a shallow platform-plank painted a brown color which I