

Mini-Guggenheim At the Orangerie

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By: Melinda Camber Porter

Throughout the winter, Parisians have had the chance to see a history of Twentieth-century art in the distinguished and compact form of Peggy Guggenheim's collection. There was, of course, no question of bringing *all* the works from Venice to the Orangerie, the collection is so large in fact, Miss Guggenheim tells us in the catalogue foreward, that at one time guest rooms and the servants' quarters in her Venetian palace had to be used in order to display it all. Later she remarks that once she had seen it spread round the ampler spaces of the Tate Gallery, she wondered how she would ever manage to fit it all back into its not inconsiderable home on the Grand Canal.

One was struck above all by the number of furious changes and divergencies in style that her collection represents: Cubism, Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, through the various forms of abstract art (particularly abstract expressionism) and out into a section entitled, with understandable vague ness, "Present-Day Tendencies." Thus, much of the sound and fury of some sixty years' movements and manifestos echoes round these rooms. As one walks through them, one is struck by how quiet many once so controversial works now seem. It is almost as though one were walking into a view from posterity.

To say which appear to signal most strongly still is clearly a very personal affair; but I found it particularly remarkable, at the beginning of the show, that Marcel Duchamp's "Jeune homme triste dans un train" should still have remained so potently mysterious, with the imagery still rocking in its own strangeness and the movement of the train. (One remembers how fortunate Peggy Guggenheim was to have had Duchamp as an early guide to the world of contemporary art.) For pure plastic beauty, Antoine Pevner's "stringed" constructivist pieces and the exquisite bird-form (*Mafastra*) by Brancusi leap to the eye—and remain there as examples of perfection of quite diverse forms.

Giacometti is shown to brilliant advantage here: at one point, two of his sculptures of women (one, headless, in plaster; another, more familiar, in bronze) guard the entrance to one of the Orangerie's rooms. The living vulnerability and loneliness of these statues recurs on a social as well as metaphysical level in "La Place." where five skeletal little figures walk their separate ways.

Other candidates for this partial list would certainly include Klee, whose fresh and witty "Portrait of Mme P." has been used on the poster to advertise the exhibition. But this is only one spectator's choice, and another would no doubt dwell on the Jackson Pollocks, or the impressive range of surrealists. Certainly a great deal of this collection's strength stems from this very capacity to attract quite contrary tastes in art.

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