

LOS ANGELES

by April Kingsley

ALONG LA CIENEGA

This first of my Los Angeles reports will focus on a few of the many galleries situated along the stretch of North La Cienega Boulevard between Melrose Boulevard and Romaine Street. That happens to be where I stopped my car, since there seemed to be so many galleries concentrated in a single area. Actually, many of them turned out to be of the frame shop-buckeye picture variety, but the real thing is generously interspersed among them.

My first stop was the Felix Landau Gallery which, unfortunately, closed its doors at the end of May (henceforth Landau will be operating his dealership privately in an upstairs office in the same building.). The new paintings of Paul Wonner comprised Landau's last public exhibition. A San Francisco Bay area painter of solid stature, now 51 years of age, Wonner has forsaken expressionist style and now favors an even more personal idiom. Although he relies heavily on Redon, Magritte, and the Renaissance painters for stylistic and iconographic inspiration, many of his new works impart a strong flavor of the American west.

Directly across the street, the Ryder Gallery shows traditional figurative sculpture in bronze by Gerald Fellman, Harry Futoran, Eugene Schodorow, and Earl Klein, along with some more abstract works in various metals by Ken Glenn, James Russell and Sanford Decker, on a more or less continual basis.

Next door, Esther Robles recently staged an interesting joint exhibition of Herb Elsky's sophisticated cast resin sculpture and a beautiful assortment of reasonably priced graphics by Appel, Baertling, Baj, Charlot, Dali, and Engel, to name just a few.

The little Mizuno Gallery's concurrent show featured paintings by Terry Allen. The major work in the show, *Sailor and . . . The Cortez Premonition*, is a three-panel painting on canvas with Plexiglas boxes projecting from two of the panels. It was the most readable, clearly articulated and visually satisfying work in the gallery, with its three panels connected by a stepping-stone pathway of wandering rocks. The subject is travel, or a specific trip, and the iconography, like that of the other works in Allen's show, is introverted and complex.

Nearby, the Ankrum Gallery recently opened an

exhibition of Frederick Wight's paintings and constructions to the sounds of Steve Soomil's electronic tape music. To judge by the less recent paintings in the show, Wight seems to have been primarily concerned with the imagery and connotations possible to the purely abstract shape of the oval — eyes, windows, cupolas — for many years. The illusionistic dimensionality of these ovals would seem to have led him to making constructions on the same theme. Wight paints and stains his constructions (which are fabricated by a master cabinet maker) to achieve a wide range of color and variety of texture. The latest of these works have prow and keel shapes and are particularly beautiful.

Further down the boulevard, Molly Barnes was showing Don Eddy's recent paintings on the day of my visit. These are beautiful examples of what I call the New-American-Airbrush-Color-Photograph-Realism. Their subjects are cars, mostly Volkswagens, on the streets and in the driveways of Suburbia. One that I found especially interesting compositionally is of a blue Cadillac, which heavily occupies the top part of a canvas (the lower is occupied by a sky-blue street). This device is used even more effectively in another painting of a green VW bug. The artist's debt to the color photograph seems more obvious than it probably is because of his use of film-like bluish tonalities, sharp cropping of the images and out-of-focus blurring around them, and dizzying perspective effects similar to those achieved with a wide-angle lens.

Eugenia Butler changed the name of her gallery to Djinni B's Hive (Djinni B standing, presumably, for Eugenia Butler) for an exhibition of the work of Paul Cotton, also known as The Transparent Teachers Ink., Absorbent Cotton, etc.). Cotton is a poet whose work has taken visual form for the last five years, and a gallery exhibition or theatrical performance is his method of publication. The exhibition in question was made up of his collected poems in the genre. Almost nothing was for sale and the main room of the gallery was largely occupied by "Random House," a first publication under which most of his subsequent publications have been subsumed. "Random House" consists of seven large stretched canvases, suspended from the ceiling about a foot

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apart, that rest on the floor. Each has a glass-less vertical window framed in wood, and all seven are aligned so that one gets a deep perspective view through them. His poetry since has evolved toward the achievement of the "the word made flesh." For this reason much of the exhibition consisted of documentation of public theatre situations in which Cotton has appeared in his Astronaut Bunny Suit, which covers all of him except his face and genitals. Cotton's close involvement with both Christianity and the Eastern religions, especially those of India, are a vital part of his work. Philosophical premises pervade all his visual and theatrical offerings. Every word is laden with double meaning, every object charged with verbal implications, in his attempt to make the life force manifest. Following a path which would seem to lead from Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni, he also parallels a great deal of the "body sculpture" being created by artists like Oppenheim, Ferrer, and Acconci, although these artists have evolved quite differently.

Unlike many of its neighbors, the Irving Blum Gallery feels like home to one accustomed to New York gallery-going. On view during a recent group showing of excellent paintings by nationally known artists, Billy Al Bengston's *Buster* of 1962 was especially interesting because of its rarity as much as its perfection of technique. The work is a masterpiece of the Southern California style that Bengston did so much to establish. For that matter, all the paintings in the show were first-rate. There was a beautiful little Sam Francis watercolor, a baroque Ron Davis polyhedron of 1969, a marvelous, strongly composed Richard Diebenkorn painting, *Ocean Park Series #29*, of 1970, and a polyester resin and fiberglass wall piece by Ed Moses, as well as a smashing red-on-red 1963 painting by Robert Irwin, now better known for his disc sculptures. The group exhibition was followed by Roy Lichtenstein's "Mirror Paintings," which were previously shown at Leo Castelli in New York.

Northernmost on this stretch of La Cienega is the Lambert Gallery which opened in January and promises to become one of the best showcases in town. Lowell Nesbitt, a well established New York artist whose flower paintings of recent years have become almost a trade-mark, was the exhibitor during my tour. In addition to *Dialogue Pink Roses*, a 1967 work which highlights the show, there were a number of more recent paintings of giant irises and several grisaille paintings of architectural details and interiors. Nesbitt was followed at Lambert by another New York artist, John Willenbecher, who showed his latest glass constructions and paintings. □