

tained in his now classic book on *The Transition from Childhood to Adolescence*, the incest taboo is needed even more in the service of privacy than of socialization. Without it, the son, especially, is likely to be driven mad by the intensity of the mother's demands, or he may succumb to a virulent form of Portnoy's complaint. Slater, psychologist though he is, does not consider the psychological protection afforded by these social mechanisms which shield the family from nuclear fission. There is something correspondingly curious, too, about his consistently neutral-to-approving use of the word "seduction" to refer to the process by which a society persuades rebels who have not got too far out to return to orbit. Seduction, as Slater uses the term to refer to *social* relationships takes on a healing connotation and yet it retains its usual undertone of hostility when applied to dyadic relationships.

*Footholds* surely raises more questions than it answers, and its most interesting passages are not its most convincing ones. But these are minor flaws in a book that succeeds so well in giving its readers a fresh look at the way of the world, and substantial grounds for understanding, if not for optimism. □

## ART

### LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

The director of the Whitney Museum of American Art announced that "the 1977 Biennial will be devoted for the most part to work by artists who had their first *decisive* influence in the 1970s" (my emphases). It is insolent to suggest that Alfred Jensen, Agnes Martin and H.C. Westerman wasted their time until the 1970s came along, but the real problem is not there. The trouble is that the Whitney is affirming its allegiance to current art in the same terms that have corroded its recent annual, now biennial, survey shows. The show opens on February 19, but there is no reason not to comment on it now, since on the whole it is so completely familiar. It continues the policy of dependence upon dealers that has sapped curatorial initiative at the museum for the past ten years.

The fault of the new show, as of its predecessors, is a socio-stylistic narrowness that follows from the museum's overdependence on constricted sources. About twenty-five of the artists (almost half the total) come from a handful of

galleries: Castelli, Sonnabend, Weber (all at 420 West Broadway, a real curatorial convenience when shopping), Paula Cooper and the (now defunct) Bykert Galleries. Realists, women artists in all styles, and artists from "peripheral" galleries are slighted by the choice. There are already rumors of a counter biennial.

What would be an effective anti-Whitney show? The criterion of dissent would not be satisfied if, say, neglected 57th Street dealers set up their own show, for that would just look like the Whitney annual of a few years back. The initiative properly lies with the artists. However, they should demand of themselves more than an ad hoc exhibition of *refusées*, hanging one another's work in a borrowed loft. Artists should recall how little attention has been paid to their past dissent. Women artists protested the low representation of their sex in the Whitney Annual for 1971. This year there are in the exhibition by my rough count of the press release, forty-three men and fourteen women—about a 3-to-1 advantage for the men. It is apparent that the Whitney staff considers itself free to operate without reference to sexual disparity in the biennials.

As it happens, there has been just recently an exhibition that was implicitly anti-Whitney. Called "Artists' Choice: Figurative Art in New York," it was arranged by the realist co-operatives—the Bowery, First Street, and Prince Street Galleries—along with the Green Mountain Gallery, a sympathetic commercial place. Between December 11 and January 5 a concordance of group shows gave the first opportunity for a broad view of current realist practice. I did not write about the show here, because I had contributed to the catalogue and these days everybody is watching for conflict of interest.

"Artists' Choice," timely though it was, suffered from a certain parochialism in the selections by the co-op artists' jury. And the shows, spread through half a dozen galleries, were uniformly ill hung. These weaknesses lessened the occasion's impact on a skeptical general audience. The jury assumed that it could count on good will and curiosity, but of course it could not. Thus the show was vulnerable to criticism that could have been avoided. The point is that, if there is to be an explicitly anti-Whitney exhibition, it should be selected critically and presented coherently. Any awkwardnesses in the protesting show will only seem to confirm the Whitney's taste by default.

One of the artists missing from "Artists' Choice" was Shirley Gorelick who is showing new paintings at SoHo 20 (until February 2). Her work is as strong and considered as ever, but with a new lyrical undercurrent. This comes through most fully in a large painting of "Three Sisters," each one of whom appears twice, once nude, once loosely robed. Thus three become a crowd, but the echoes of paired likenesses and family resemblance imply a pattern of kinship. The girls, all posed toward the spectator, stand in a garden, ankle-deep in leaves, against an overgrown wall. There is no horizon line so the overall impression is of a dark green, bosky tapestry with strong implications of the double theme, like a club of *Doppelgängers*.

However the models are studied attentively, so that to the psychological atmosphere created by the doubling and the alternation of bodies and drapery, is added a realistic core. These are the overweight adolescent girls of late 20th-century America, losing their waistlines and with creased stomachs. Gorelick's way of painting solidifies surface and detail into dense, cameo-like pigment. The heavy women and the evocative garden are unified in a single skin of paint. The painting is an extraordinary visualization of the quotidian and psychic aspects of adolescence.

After "Artists' Choice" at the Prince Street Gallery, one of the co-op's members, Marion Lerner Levine, showed a group of new still lifes. In oil and watercolor she has developed a high-keyed range of color combined with curt and shaky contours. The effect is of an imagery of fugitive forms and constant light. Her subject matter is taken from the kitchen shelf and table, rows and heaps of cans, usually imported, ablaze with European romanticism. On the labels tomatoes flourish as if growing in the kitchen; swans curve their necks; long-skirted figures proffer rich baskets. The cans are like little glowing chunks of Mediterranean folklore and climate. Her skill and wit are a reminder of the abilities that abound in realist art, but of which "Artists' Choice" did not give a convincing impression. So, if there is to be a counter biennial it should rest on a critical stance. If it does not, the good work will not be truly visible. □

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