

THE NATION

LOS ANGELES

Wolf calls and frog songs

Veteran performance artist Joan Jonas was recently artist-in-residence at California State College, Long Beach, and the University of California, Berkeley. Each of these residencies introduced students to her working process as well as her conceptual development, and in both situations public performances were given. At Berkeley the performances were presented as a retrospective of Jonas' work, while at Long Beach student-created props and staging culminated in *Upside Down and Backwards*, performed at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art. It is obvious that this kind of exposure—to students, the art community and the public—is by far the most effective way to present an artist's esthetic. In the case of performance art, which is so incomprehensible to many, it is especially important to provide background material in a variety of ways. Both projects were funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

From the beginning of her career, Jonas has investigated the nature of perception, particularly the effect on perception of movement in time and space. These interests developed out of her undergraduate studies in sculpture and art history. Early performances included the juxtaposition of live action and videotaped sequences of both two- and three-dimensional modes of mark-making, or abstract systems—that is, dance, or ritual movement through space, and drawing. The aural component has always included primitive sounds—human wailing and wolf calls.

While Jonas' more recent performances continue to incorporate perceptual explorations of two- and three-dimensional space, of time and of sound, she has added to these an interest in color perception and a narrative component in the form of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. The vaguely archetypal and ritualistic references have thus become more specific. In *Upside Down and Backwards* the performance begins with a taped recording of Jonas reading "The Frog Prince" backwards and "The Boy Who Went Out to Learn Fear" forwards. The familiar sequence of the narrative is further complicated by alternating a paragraph from one story with a paragraph from the other. The performance ends with Jonas' contemporary amalgamation of the folk tales, which hints at a reconciliation of opposing forces. It may sound as if Jonas' incorporation of archetypal narratives would make her work more concrete, less abstract, but she includes so many layers of information in addition to the narratives—music, both traditional and contemporary,

audiotapes played simultaneously, and thus difficult to understand, and a great deal of ritual movement enacted with props—that the recent performances are actually more complex than the older ones.

Integral to *Upside Down and Backwards* set are three large paintings. The images of all three are simple, linear pictographs executed in double lines—blue and yellow lines depicting two half moons and a square;



DOUGLAS M. PARKER

Joan Jonas performs *Upside Down and Backwards*: jarring juxtapositions of opposites and a metaphorical observation on the nature of death.

red and yellow lines depicting a southwestern landscape, mountain, cactus, road; and blue and yellow lines depicting an arch/womb/cave symbol. (The introduction of color in Jonas' work came with the fairy-tale narratives, which employ color symbolically.) Other props include simple objects like a stool, a ball, a hammer, a piece of glass and mirrors. More ritualistic references were evoked by Jonas' use of masks, an alter-ego head and a skeleton. The mirrors, masks, double-line paintings and dramatic colored lighting, to create shadow images, all deal with a repeated, duplicate or reflected image, alluding to the fact that "ordinary" everyday life and objects are simultaneously infused with ritual magic and power.

When Jonas dances with a mannequin head, we become witness to our own dual natures, one that acts and the other that observes and contemplates the action, often

perceiving symbolic or ritual meanings. For example, as Jonas undresses a skeleton and comments that "the shirt is inside out," she is making a literal statement about the condition of the shirt and the skeleton as well as a metaphorical observation about the nature of death, which turns life inside out. The piece abounds in these jarring juxtapositions of opposites—the artist gently cradling the skeleton, as in a traditional *pietà*, then literally and symbolically performing a dance of death as lyrical as it is horrifying.

The audiotape's harsh rock and punk sounds alternate with Jonas' lyrical playing of a hand-cranked German music box. The verbal, visual and actual movements and props add layer upon layer of synchronistic relationships to one another, synchronistic in the Jungian sense of irrationally related events out of which the perceiver/dreamer makes sense. Thus we hear the fairy-tale frog singing "let me in," while in fact he is kept out; our visual perception moves in and out of two- and three-dimensional space, the artist both revealing and concealing herself, and we are allowed to confront and withdraw from the images of the cave, mountain, death, or the ball, spring, life in the infinite cyclical rhythms of existence.

Thanks to Katherine Mead, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's curator of collections, southern California audiences in both La Jolla and Santa Barbara have been privileged to see the fruit of Sidney Janis' three decades of collecting. The impressive array of more than 50 paintings and sculptures includes examples of virtually every major movement in 20th-century art since 1912, from Cubism to Constructivism and de Stijl, from Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism and Pop. There is no single museum in southern California with this range of material. Major Surrealist work like the Dali and Magritte's, Russian work like the rigorous and elegant nonobjective *Proun 3a*, ca. 1920, by El Lissitzky, or the *Blue Sponge Reality* by Yves Klein—the eccentric French expressionist who, as a performance artist, was ahead of his time—all bring new information to southern California audiences.

It is important to remember and recognize the valuable services provided by people like Janis who have amassed and preserved significant art collections, in addition to donating a significant part of their holdings to museums—the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in Janis' case. Not only is Janis' collection remarkable for its high quality but also for its breadth of taste. That the same person who would respond to the purist reductionism of Albers would also admire the kinky eroticism of Hans Bellmer, for example, is highly unusual, as it is to find the 20th-century primitive painter Morris Hirshfield collected along with Pollock and de Kooning. Normally we

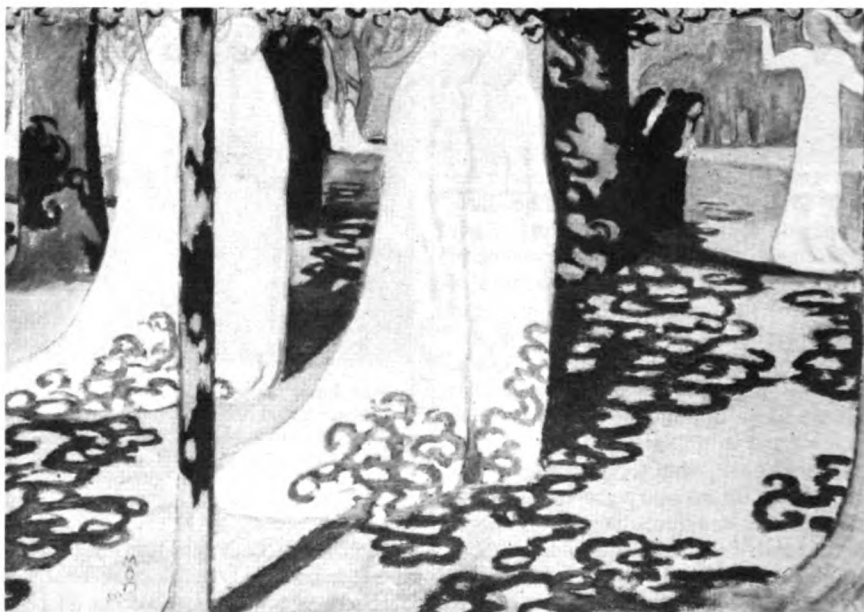
think of dealers as specializing in a certain period. We associate Daniel Kahnweiler, for example, with Cubism. That Janis' keen eye has selected West Coast artists of different generations—Mark Tobey and Max Cole—also attests to the pervasiveness of his vision and interest.

As we appreciate the diversity of the Janis Collection, we can also see strands of continuity that carry through the nearly 70 years encompassed by his acquisitions. We might see the subtle, neutral tonalities and grid composition of Braque's hermetic *Cubist Still Life of 1912*, for example, clarified and honed in the quiet expressionism of Agnes Martin's small, exquisite grid of tiny nails and lines on canvas from the 1960s or Max Cole's horizontal line painting of the 1970s. Interesting European/American comparisons can be made between the figurative expressionism of Alberto Giacometti and Jean Dubuffet and the Abstract Expressionism of contemporaneous works by Pollock, de Kooning and others. Another instructive comparison can be seen in the work of Jean Arp and Hans Bellmer, whose sculptures of smooth white marble and abstract figuration in approximately the same scale are superficially similar, but altogether different in effect. While the Arp evokes a number of allusions, the content of the Bellmer is much more explicitly erotic. Both Pollock in *Number 1*, 1948, and Tobey in *Wild Field*, 1959, employ active, expressionist, all-over compositions, but the differences in emotional tone are dramatized by contrast, Pollock's being much more agitated and Tobey's more serene, despite the latter's density.

Kirk de Gooyer has opened a gallery bearing his name in the rapidly revitalizing downtown industrial area of Los Angeles. Located at 830 South Central, the gallery has 3,800 square feet and 16-foot ceilings. De Gooyer comes to the commercial gallery business from the University of California, Riverside, and has studied arts administration at Harvard University. He thus brings knowledge as well as enthusiasm to this difficult vocation. He intends to exhibit work by numerous California artists of quality who are not yet represented by other galleries. The opening exhibition consisted of very large, mixed-media floor and wall pieces by Los Angeles artist Rita Yokoi. Constructed of acrylic paint and papier-mâché on a wood base, these forms are of two different types. A group of circular wall works contains a series of painted arcs in brilliant colors that begin at the edges and stop short of the center, creating a sense of spinning movement. These occupy the front section of the gallery. The area in the rear is inhabited by oversized leaves and flowers constructed of the same materials. All of the objects are brilliantly colored pinks, greens, purples and other hot hues. Together they create a celebratory fantasy environment that is at the opposite end of the emotional spectrum from the biting social criticism of the artist's earlier work. —Melinda Wortz



Walter Richard Sickert, *L'Hotel Royal, Dieppe*, ca. 1894, oil on canvas, 19¾ by 24 inches. Private collection.



Maurice Denis, *Procession Under the Trees*, 1892, oil on canvas, 22 by 32 inches. Collection of Arthur G. Altschul.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Too many people under one roof

The wisest approach to the National Gallery's big summer exhibition, "Post-Impressionism: Cross-Currents in European and American Painting, 1880-1906," was to confine one's attentions to the 273 pictures on view without taking the trouble to determine what the show was all about. The paintings were spectacular: no fewer than 50 works by the celebrated quartet customarily identified as the central figures of Post-

Impressionism—Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh and Seurat—plus dozens upon dozens of works by artists compelling in their own right, if not of such lofty stature. There were pictures by the lesser French Post-Impressionists—Louis Anquetin, Emile Bernard, Maurice Denis, Paul Sérusier, Paul Signac—and by their long-neglected compatriots from the Salon, men such as Jean Béraud, Dagnan-Bouveret, Maignan and Alfred Roll. Farther on were works by such lively central and northern Europeans as Lovis Corinth, Erich Heckel, Ferdinand Hodler, Edvard Munch and Max Slevogt. Still farther were the splendid full-flower Matisse

Original from