

# Small worlds

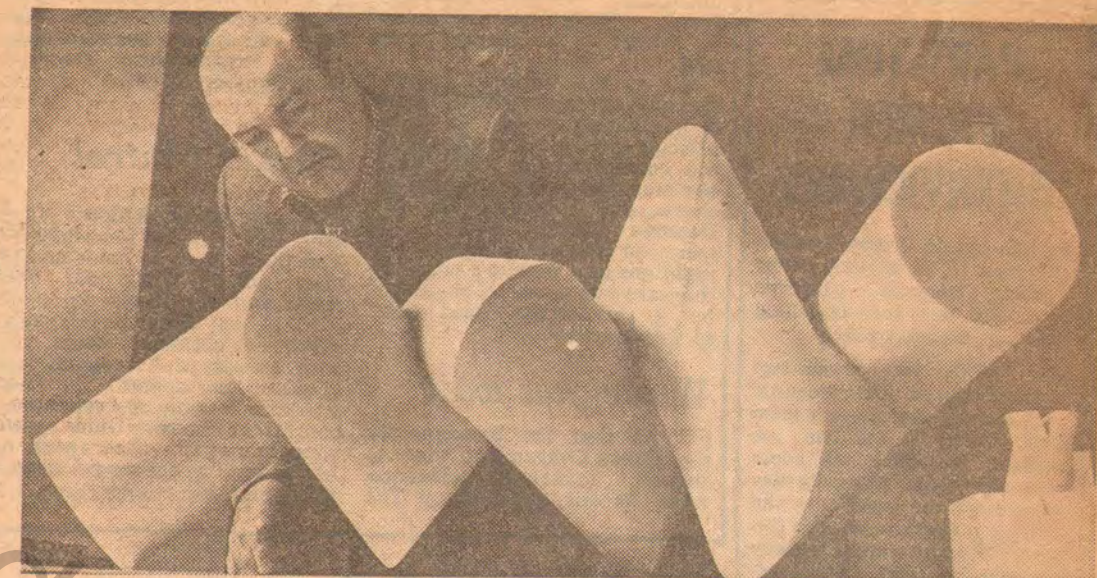
## ART

by NIGEL GOSLING

SCALE, like everything else, is subject to the swing of fashion. A few years ago jumbo-sized canvases and enormous sculptures were the rage. Now the pendulum seems to be swinging towards the miniature and I find my own inclinations keeping pace with the trend.

Of the exhibitions I saw last week, I most enjoyed the smallest shows and the tiniest exhibits. At the Fischer gallery (until 15 February) Leon Kossoff has nearly 40 paintings and drawings all done in the last two years. He is a fairly familiar figure on the London art scene. Born in 1926 within the sound of Bow Bells, he later became a pupil of Bomberg and has exhibited his thickly painted, darkly imagined pictures regularly, culminating in a retrospective at the Whitechapel gallery in 1972. A manifest Expressionist, he has ploughed a lonely, clotted furrow through the cool bright pastures of recent British art.

In the Whitechapel show there were some lively studies of a swimming bath, which



J. S. LEWINSKI

The Brazilian sculptor Camargo with one of his pieces at the Gimpel gallery.

suggested a move towards comparative cheerfulness. But the clouds have gathered again. At the Fischer there are mostly heavy, dark-toned paintings, in which the lumps and swirls of pigment seem to contain a load of deep feeling. Kossoff kneads the image into the paint until the two are inseparable.

At its best this fusion is impressive, but in the figure paintings the effort to amalgamate looms too large, and the problems arising from the emphasis on texture and handling are not always solved. The drawing of a mouth or a jawline becomes imposed, as though unsure whether it is supposed to define a form, express a mood or catch a moment of actuality. The

townscapes are much more skilfully handled especially the small ones; and I particularly liked the drawings and the gouaches.

Kossoff exudes a kind of glowing gloom—a mood not inappropriate to viewing conditions at the moment, but which actually seems to be a residue of post-war austerity. An echo of the same period runs through the sculpture of Lynn Chadwick at the Marlborough gallery until 9 February (restricted viewing times this week, Monday-Saturday 10 a.m.-12.30 p.m.). He made his name in the fifties as an exponent of Anxiety; at that time his little winged figures seemed like sinister vultures waiting for our demise.

He has not changed the image in his new pieces, but has reverted to a degree of naturalism. The little tripod manikins are much the best things here, and he has made an impressive large-scale group called 'Three Elektras.' But elsewhere the change is not a happy one. Once his figures have two legs instead of three they tend to look like cartoon characters or strays from a space-serial; and the sitting pairs are alarmingly like mackintosh holidaymakers on a beach. There is a sense of pulling back from a rich idiom instead of pushing it forward.

Camargo, at the Gimpel gallery (until 2 February), is, on the other hand, finding new and interesting ways of slicing a cylinder and reassembling the bits. Carried out in the whitest of marble, cut by machine, these simple-looking and anonymous pieces contain, on examination, a wealth of subtleties.

But even more I enjoyed a rather mysterious show called Strata at the Royal College of Art (until 8 February). I was not sure what thread connected the five American artists, who stretch from Ellsworth Kelly to Cy Twombly, but all are concerned with the pure craft of making marks on a surface and the results make an intelligent, serious, sensitive and delightful little collection.

Also recommended to the connoisseur are some tiny etchings by Bill Laing included in the exhibition of acquisitions at the DM gallery until 2 February (72 Fulham Road, SW3)—the English lyrical imagination at its best, and still inexpensive. They are as astonishingly compact as a new set of lithographs by David Hockney in a new gallery, Kinsman Morrison (29 Maddox Street, W1), are impressively big—portrait studies which triumphantly prove that the art of drawing is far from dead. Maholy Nagy's photographs and photograms continue at Nigel Greenwood until 2 February (41 Sloane Gardens, SW1). Those who like a bit more ketchup will enjoy Paul Wright's accomplished Pop-ish drawings at Grabowski's until 31 January (175 Draycott Avenue, SW3).