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Art

Latin America by Paul Overy

The lively Midland Group gallery in Nottingham has put on a large exhibition of recent Latin American art which is split between the gallery itself, the foyer of the Nottingham Playhouse and the Castle Museum. The paintings and prints in the Castle Museum, mostly in the international style of decorative expressionism, are the least interesting. In the Playhouse are displayed large pieces of sculpture, not entirely without originality, but all very close to the American 'Primary Structures' and their British derivatives. By far the most vital work is the concrete and kinetic art shown in the gallery. The beginnings of this, as of the related development of concrete poetry in South America, have sometimes been traced to the visit of the Swiss artist and designer Max Bill in the early 1950s. A former Bauhaus student, Bill has been very influential as the champion of concrete art, and a dialogue between Latin American artists and designers and the European tradition of geometric abstraction undoubtedly began at about this time—

exemplified by the fact that the Brazilian Tomas Maldonado became Bill's successor as head of the Design School at Ulm.

With the exception of the Venezuelan J. R. Soto, whose work is not represented at Nottingham, the most important of the South American artists are the Brazilians, Lygia Clark, Helio Oiticica and Sergio Camargo. The Argentinians, like Julio Le Parc and Hugo Demarco, have tended, under the cover of 'visual research' to go for showy effects of light and movement, producing elegant exercises which quickly pall. The Brazilian artists have explored the relationship between the spectator and the work, the action of light on objects and the possibilities of movement in a far less superficial way.

In the upper gallery there are three of Lygia Clark's fascinating hinged metal sculptures which the spectator can manipulate, revealing for himself the multiple implications of adjacent forms. Her later pieces, of which there is one at Nottingham, are rubber loops which can be twisted and stretched in a far less mechanical and subtler manipulation of space. Oiticica's *Bolides* (fireballs) are large glass bottles filled with earth colours in pigment form or similar substances, or wooden boxes painted with the same earth pigments containing strange objects or pieces of material which can be partially pulled out by the spectator. It is difficult to describe these curious and beautiful objects without

diminishing them: they have to be handled and felt with both hand and eye, conveying feelings of warmth, of mental and physical expansion. A large exhibition of Oiticica's work is due at the Whitechapel Gallery this September.

Three of Camargo's white reliefs are on view at Nottingham and he is having a concurrent one-man exhibition in London at the Gimpel Fils Gallery. Camargo works in Paris; and his earliest contacts there were with Brancusi, Arp and Vantongerloo, whose influence is clear in his reliefs and sculptures constructed from cylindrical wooden elements sawn off at an angle. These vary greatly in size, and are either grouped closely together in almost swarming profusion or spaced apart so that they relate across blank areas. They are always painted a dazzling white, and the shadows which the angled cylinders cast, changing with changing light or the time of day, constitute the element of movement in these otherwise static works. When Camargo uses large cylinders they seem more organic and are slightly reminiscent of Brancusi's *Torso of a Young Man*. (In the London show there is a tall marble sculpture which has a kinship with his *Endless Column*.) With smaller elements, they seem rather to suggest mathematical or geometrical relationships, but throughout his work there is a constant interplay between the rational and intuitive and the organic and geometric.