

A YOUNG BRAZILIAN ARTIST - IVAN SERPA

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By ALBERT D. HINRICHSEN

Just now that the art world is lamenting the premature death of Candido Portinari, it is a soothing thought to remember that in present-day Brazil there exists a younger generation of painters who, apart from already considerable achievement, hold out even greater promise for the future.

Among these is Ivan Serpa, a carioca born in 1923 and presently living at a pleasant two-story house, on the top of a hilly road in Rio's Meier district. On his invitation I



Ivan Serpa

visited him there recently and found him hard at work refurbishing his studio.

Although the Serpas have moved into this residence barely two years ago, it has already been found necessary to enlarge the premises, to make room for the growing number of oils of large dimensions which Serpa produces for private collectors and public exhibitions.

Clad in a suit of light linen pajamas, in true Brazilian fashion, Serpa was hammering

copper tacks into huge wooden panels to fasten his canvases, cut from a roll he had personally bought in Belgium. This Belgian canvas is much more weather-resistant and will adhere much better to the colors than any variety produced so far locally, according to Mr. Serpa.

Some four or five of these covered panels are standing around waiting to be painted and to be sent to the 1st Buenos Aires Biennial Exposition opening in June. Serpa is looking forward to the possibility of winning a prize at this new venture. He is of course no newcomer to Biennials, having exposed at all but one of the six São Paulo ones as well as two Venice Biennials.

Last year's São Paulo Biennial earned him the Ardeia prize. Other awards pocketed by him are the National Junior Prize of 1951 from the first S. Paulo Biennial, the UNESCO prize from the third Biennial, and of course the Foreign Travel Prize earned at the 1957 Rio National Salon of Modern Art. This prize, which one might term Brazil's "Prix de Rome," sent him on a study tour of two years to France, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain and Portugal. He certainly did not waste his time in Europe. Apart from deeply delving into the great standard collections of the Louvre, Prado, Albertina, etc., Serpa attended temporary expos such as the uni-

que Kassel show 1958 of modern art, assembled from all over the world and crowding three buildings. Fourteen days of whole-day visits were needed to digest this exhibit.

The result of this impressive tour of the European continent has been a complete change in the artist's style. Starting out under tuition of Austrian Leskoschek with figurative drawings of great tenderness and academic orthodoxy, of which he showed me an album, Serpa had then turned to the spectacular, but stiff, concretism advocated also by many of his friends and famous in Brazil under the name of "grupo frente."

To the "grupo frente" activities Serpa contributed many beautiful collages with colored tissue-paper, but the much freer and more fluent abstractism of his post-European works appears to me as a more faithful expression of his individuality and to bear really the stamp of originality.

U.S. viewers will be able to see the later Serpa in an exposition opening March 30 at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the Rio Modern Art Museum has a selection of his pictures.

Mr. Serpa is moreover connected to the Rio Modern Art Museum through his teaching of three classes of children, the annual expositions of which provide the delight of local art-lovers.

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