

'Linear Construction' by Naum Gabo

## Soundings Two BY FREDERICK LAWS



THE "Signals" gallery at 39 Wigmore Street, London, W 1, has been in action for a little over a year. In a quarter full of doctors, opticians, and dentists, it has three good floors of exhibition space with good lighting and facilities for demonstrating kinetic devices dependent on electricity, magnetism or motors.

The atmosphere of the place is youthful, evangelical, and prosperous. Exhibitions are supported by a large and lively newspaper which has reached its eighth number and now has sixteen pages of pictures, poems, theories, thanks, and congratulations. The promotion has force and naturally tends to induce an equal and opposite resistance in those of us who are counter-suggestible. The current exhibition, called "Soundings Two" is the first half of a house miscellany to which examples of the work of some of the best non-figurative artists of the last fifty years have been added.

The inference is that kinetic and optical artists, makers of mobiles and bubble-machines and articulated variable sculpture are in a continuous tradition of development from the pioneers of abstract art, from constructivists, Dada, Merz, Suprematism and the onward march of science. This I in no way believe. But then I remember that Henry Moore once let himself be called a surrealist. It is a curious thing that the further artists take their work towards a "purity" of line, space, remembered sensation, the more words are supplied to wrap around them.

Let us return to the objects exhibited. You may see here by the old masters of half a dozen modern movements a light and most beautiful "Linear Construction" by Naum Gabo, a very fine Ben Nicholson, a grey-black-blue Kandinsky, several Schwitters, a small Malevitch and a difficult Moholy-Nagy. There is also a tiny Alexander Calder—a strangely small representation when you consider how much his work stopped people talking about "toys" and stuffed some American museums with the wearisome engines of his imitators.

Connecting Schwitters with Camargo, Arp with Takis, Gabo with Pol Bury demands a kind of metaphysical knitting for which I am untrained. Anyway, why should the avant-garde be expected to keep on even roughly the same compass-

bearing? Or why should artists be movements?

The house name of "Signals" comes from Takis who uses magnetism, flickering lights and the interaction of gravity with other forces to make patterns in the air. I take pleasure in his groups of tall wires with relevant bits of steel on the end, but find that irregular lamps and balls that swing unpredictably around magnets mean nothing to me. Nor can I take much interest in nails held faintly quivering in the air. Still, a Takis has in common with a scientific experiment that it either adds to experience or is quite null.

Pol Bury is here represented by a thing of creeping and clicking nails and a slightly more comprehensible set of black balls emerging irregularly from a black box. They tick, too, and I don't know why, or greatly care.

Sergio de Camargo of Brazil is known for white on white wood reliefs made up of forms as simple as cut corks in patterns of great complexity made more remarkable by shadow. An impressive one called "Aerial Landscape" could be representational. Possibly also, a spiky and pitted figure in the round of his could have to do with an owl. Alberto Guzman from Peru welds sticks and slabs of iron into constructions as light as a bird's nest—but useless and original.

There are strictly abstract reliefs in white or red by a Chinese artist, Li Yuen-Chia, whose regularity is broken or emphasised by apparently casual spots or splashes. Some poor devil will one day write a long chapter of art history about the interaction of straight-edge and spatter and their Kleiman significance. He might, of course, say hard-edge and tache if those words are remembered.

Antonio Asis plants vibrating springs in red or blue on walls of the same colour—which looks well. So do Lygia Clark's arrangements of hinged steel and troubling intelligence-test-like rectangles made of geometrical jigsaw pieces.

The most considerable of the new inventions come from the Venezuelan J. R. Soto who adds vibration to strange colour super-impositions. Equally astonishing, though kinder to the eye, are the "physicromies" of Carlos Cruz-Diez, another Venezuelan. These create changing illusory colour as the observer moves, are not to be plausibly described in words nor, I suspect, easily imitated. Worth seeing, as the whole show is, if you just look.