

## ART REVIEW

# In Connecticut, David Smith and Lord Snowdon Reign

By GRACE GLUECK

Whatever its other virtues Connecticut is a fine place to look at art, particularly in the summer when the New York scene goes sleepy. This year the range seems particularly strong, from a Picasso show in Hartford to a David Smith presentation clear across the state in New London. In between one could visit a show about art and the law in Ridgefield; view a vastly entertaining display of photographs by Lord Snowdon, former husband of Princess Margaret, in New Haven; and see what Yale's gallery has been up to since it started collecting in 1932.

## Wadsworth Atheneum

This museum goes back a long way with Picasso, having organized his first major show in the United States in 1934. Its latest paean is "Picasso: The Artist's Studio," focusing on the studio as the core of his creative universe. There he not only painted but also seduced lovers and collectors, manipulated dealers, blanded critics and champions and sought to further his own role in art history.

The Wadsworth, in collaboration with the Cleveland Museum of Art, has assembled some 35 paintings and 10 drawings pertaining to his studio done by Picasso during his 80-year career. They range from an academic charcoal drawing of a hefty, disembodied arm (1894), made in his student days, to an allegory of old age from 1969, four years before his death. In between this alpha and omega there is no lack of Picassos to ponder, from portraits of lovers to spirited takeoffs on work by masters like Velázquez and Matisse. Of the many outright salutes to his workplace, "The Studio" (1927-28) is Picasso's closest pass at abstraction in this show. Its sharp linear structure breaks room and artist into geometric forms and color areas, distilling the subject to its essence. In cluttered contrast is "The Studio" of 1955, a Matisse-y vision of his new workplace at La Californie, the 19th-century villa he bought near Cannes that year. A grand salon packed with paintings, furniture, an easel and other painterly props, it has a magnificent floor-to-ceiling window with a view of a flourishing garden.

The viewer may have trouble connecting some of the works here to the overall theme, but not to worry. With this lineup of paintings and drawings, who needs a rationale?

## Lyman Allyn Museum of Art

Shows devoted to the American sculptor David Smith (1906-65) usually celebrate his powerful achievements in the realm of 3-D. But he started out primarily as a painter, and this illuminating exhibition, "David Smith: Two Into Three Di-

mensions," organized by the art critic Karen Wilkin, stresses the relationships between his painting and his sculpture. An important phase in his development as a sculptor was building reliefs from flat painted surfaces. The earliest one shown is "Untitled" (circa 1930), a playful, brilliantly colored abstraction in which a raised surface is achieved by careful manipulation of paint textures.

Even in the 1950's, when he had begun the big freestanding outdoor pieces of welded steel that brought him fame, Smith was producing "relief paintings," flat canvases to which he affixed bits of bone and metal, which gave them a more pronounced sculptural dimension than the earlier ones. Although the individual paintings are small, the group has an assertive presence. Several works in metal relief don't come off nearly as well.

Smith said he did not recognize "the limits where painting ends and sculpture begins," and this show throws new light on that statement. If some of the work is less than his best, it's still a show to learn from.

## Yale Center for British Art

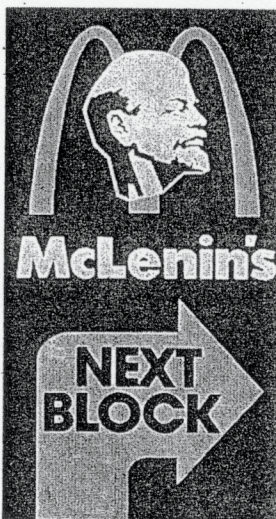
An agile toad known as a natterjack has the star quality of a human celeb in this very animated show, "Photographs by Snowdon: A Retrospective." Looking straight at the camera, it stands like a dancer poised on one leg, the other thrown over the top of a glass tank, its froggy face bearing a distinct resemblance to Winston Churchill.

The toad symbolizes the incredible variety of subjects shot by Lord Snowdon in more than 50 years of picture taking. Often on assignment for Vogue, Vanity Fair and The Telegraph magazine in London, he has not let many of the world's camera-worthies escape his avid lens, from the spying art historian Anthony Blunt (shown in 1963 examining a slide that is reflected on his eyeball) to the seductive Uma Thurman, draped on a sofa in a scene from "The Golden Bowl."

Although his subjects — from the worlds of society, fashion, the arts, royalty, animals and the expansive realm known as photojournalism — tend to be pretty foolproof, he has a knack for catching them at expressive if not defining moments.

Examples include the painter Max Ernst in a frilly nightcap gnawing on some very dead bones (1963); the bodice-ripper novelist Barbara Cartland (1988), a symphony in pink with a halo of fluffy white hair that matches the poodle she is holding; the artist Damien Hirst seated nude in a tank of fish and lobsters (1991); and Prime Minister Tony Blair looking wistfully concerned in a 1995 closeup.

The show also includes poignant shots from documentary essays on old age, poor children and mental hospitals. Lord Snowdon does get around, and if there's a little too



"McLenin's" by Aleksandr Kosolapov, at the Bruce Museum.

much professional polish — not to say glibness — that doesn't keep his work from being entertaining.

## Yale University Art Gallery

Right across the street from the Yale Center, the Yale University Art Gallery has proudly mounted "Art for Yale: Defining Moments," a show that traces the growth of its collections since the gallery's founding in 1932. An array of some 150 significant objects from all the curatorial departments, the exhibition focuses on works that were the first of their kind to be acquired, single masterpieces and groundbreaking groups like the Société Anonyme collection of Modernist art assembled by Katherine Dreier, Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray between 1920 and 1940.

The well-thought-out display makes a pleasant meander among Italian and Northern Renaissance art, early American paintings, portrait miniatures, Greek vases, Asian ceramics, old master prints, early Modernist and contemporary art and decorative objects. A companion show presents a fine group of prints, drawings and photographs acquired with funds left by Everett V. Meeks, dean of Yale's School of Fine Arts from 1920 to 1947.

"Art for Yale" has so many highlights that the term becomes meaningless. The paintings alone are a collective tour de force, including European treasures like a pair of incisive portraits of an elderly Dutch couple by Frans Hals (1643); Manet's sexy "Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume" (1862), in which she appears in toreador drag; van

Gogh's "Night Cafe" (1888), a seedy hangout blazing with intense color; and Kandinsky's lovely Cubist-Fauveish "Waterfall" (1909).

Other items in the show only begin to suggest the incredible range of objects other than paintings, including a knockout mahogany masterpiece combining bookcase and innovative block-front desk from Newport, circa 1760-1785; an elaborate silver tea kettle made by the Philadelphia silversmith Joseph Richardson, circa 1745-55; and a beautifully carved early-20th-century Chokwe mask from West Africa that depicts an idealized female ancestor.

## Aldrich Museum

The provocatively titled "Art at the Edge of the Law" is a mixed bag of art about or involved with legalities, but it's not quite as hard-nosed as it sounds. It includes some works that do elbow at the boundaries of the law, others that merely comment on activities that do so, and those that simply tweak the social order's status quo.

One of the most freewheeling exhibits is from the Institute for Applied Autonomy, an anonymous group of engineers, designers, artists and activists. Pushing for more individual and collective freedom, the group has come up with a robot called "StreetWriter" that is built into the underside of a truck. Operated by remote control, it can print subversive statements on the road at high speed as the truck moves along.

Another group activity, shown in video here, is that of the Barbie Liberation Organization, a loose-knit clan that opposes war toys and gender myths. Several years ago members went into toy stores and bought hundreds of TeenTalk Barbies, whose recorded voice included the phrase "Math is hard," and GI Joe dolls that proclaimed, "Dead men tell no lies." They switched the voice boxes and clandestinely replaced the dolls on store shelves. Well, it got a lot of publicity.

Artists working individually include Janice Kerbel, who in 1997 began to plot the robbery of a bank branch in London. Her detailed surveillance of the site is laid out in "Bank Job, 1999," a series of photographs and plans that even include driving directions for a getaway to Spain. Her frequent visits to the bank, where she took measurements and scribbled notes, did not go unnoticed by officials. The robbery, however, has yet to come off.

More than a few items in this sprawling spread demand a fair amount of label reading, but the show's quirky approach to the uses of art makes it all worthwhile.

## Bruce Museum

Russian art began to emerge from the ideological script of Socialist Re-

alism after Stalin's death in 1953, but very, very slowly and with setbacks galore. In 1988, however, with government restrictions relaxed, came the end of censorship and the debut of hitherto forbidden Soviet art on the international scene.

"Forbidden Art of Postwar Russia" in Greenwich is a well-ordered show drawn from the private collection, some 30 years in the making, of Yuri Praisman, a Russian immigrant. It covers the post-Stalin period with telling examples from each of the increasingly more open artistic phases that took Russian art — well, some of it — back to mainstream concepts.

The liveliest artists in the show, and the ones best known to Americans, are the activists who first gained recognition in what is known as the Sots Art and post-Sots Art movements of the 1970's and 80's. (Sots is an abbreviation for the Russian word for socialism). Among Sots Art's founders are Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, now living in New York. Their Pop-oriented work sends up the Soviet bureaucracy's manufactured ideology; in "Pravda" (1987), for example, fragments of print from the newspaper that claims to speak for all are contrasted with an image of a young nude alone in the privacy of a shadowy room. (It is too bad the show couldn't muster better examples of the Komar-Melamid teamwork.)

Another Sots Art alumnus is Leonid Sokov, whose "Meeting of Two Sculptures" (1990) juxtaposes a traditional bronze figure of Lenin with the attenuated modernist presence of a Giacometti-like figure striding along to greet him: an encounter between Socialist Realism and European Modernism. On the same order of absurdity is Aleksandr Kosolapov's "McLenin's" (1991), a yellow and red poster (the Soviet colors) with Lenin's head backed by a McDonald's golden arch that directs the viewer to a post-Soviet meal.

Naturally, there was a post-Sots Art movement, whose best-known practitioners are Ilya Kabakov and Grisha Bruskin. Mr. Kabakov, who produces ironic tableaux of Soviet domestic and other social rituals is, alas, minimally represented here by four drawings of a window in a communal apartment that gradually fills with angels' wings. Mr. Bruskin's best-known works are catatonic tableaux that mock the myth of the Soviet citizen. In "Birth of the Hero" (1987), a set of 15 white-painted bronze figures, traditional Soviet types, each holding a different Soviet symbol (like a hammer and sickle) in red, stand side by side with magical otherworldly creatures who apparently allude to the Communist distortion of religion into propaganda. This ambitious show, with its careful attention to trends and movements and its exposure of the whole gamut of postwar Soviet art, adds up to a surprisingly rich survey.