Hayden Gallery inaugurates Arts and Media

Giacometti in Focus: The Albert and Vera List Family Collection. Through April 21, at the new Hayden Gallery, Arts & Media Technology Building (MIT), westAlter 10, kentish Hall 3-5, PM.

There is a sense of clarity of fresh light and spacious space, as one enters the renovated Hayden Gallery at MIT's new Visual and Media Technologv Center. The current unfinished state of the Arts and Media Technology Building adds to that a feeling of expecta- tion, of a work in progress, particularly fitting in a gallery intended to monitor the coming edge of Modern Art. Quite appropriately, the first exhibition presented in this new environment amounts to a balance. And quite fortunately, the Albert and Vera List Collection featured in it is the kind of private collection combining a fascinating inventory with a refreshing sense of personal taste.

Yet that it lacks scope, however. Indeed, the extent to which it is representative of Modern Art today is regrettable. But it has that attractive blend of selection and contingency that sets it apart from the usual 80 percent of many museum collections.

The organization has arranged the objects in a particular order. It is worthwhile, though, to sort them out a bit, to discover their role in the vast spectacle that is Modern Art.

One is drawn immediately to three pieces dating from the '40s, which set the scale for all the later work. Giacometti's Cigareille, on which figures in his unalterable canvas wonder aimlessly, helplessly, as if crushed by the naked space around them, sums up the cultural anxiety of the time. Against this image of emptiness, the bronze Torso, with its angularity, its easy, suggestion, perhaps hieratic symbols,sum- merises. (Kandor's Winged Creature, though of later date, draws upon the same source.) In the Prouser in His Garden by Jean Dubuffet, we encounter that atmosphere of childlike spontaneity that is such an important innovation of 20th-century art.

A note next to Dubuffet's painting quotes him from Perspectives sur l'art moderne (1946): "Art should always make us laugh a little and frighten us a lit- tle, but never bore us." It is a device to remember. (By the way, more than a few of the other exhibition notes enhance the understanding of the later Wingersen, rather than of the art to which they refer.)

Many objects in the exhibition, then, could be conceptual, rather than historical, sense be interpreted as direct continuations of that early work. Mutual's Baby Bus, for instance, adheres closely to the spirit of Dubuffet's Prouser. The spatial tension of the Cigareille is reinterpreted in the Untitled composition of Joel Shapiro (whose other works on display are not particularly inspiring), while the rough, rudi- mentary quality of Giacometti's figures re- peats in Deborah Butterfield's Day Horse.

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