THE U. S. A.—Mobile by Calder.

Cultural Diplomacy: An Art We Neglect

How U. S. artists might win friends and influence allies is shown in a South American exhibit.

By ALINE B. LOUCHHEIM

SAO PAULO, Brazil.

THE largest and most important international exhibition of modern art ever held in the Western Hemisphere opened recently not in New York, not in Los Angeles, not even in Mexico City—but far, far away on the other side of the Equator. Over 4,000 works of art and important personages from thirty-nine countries traveled across the vast jungles of a country as big as the United States with an extra Texas, to São Paulo, Brazil. Here, in a city which boasts of being the "fastest growing city in the world" (Paulistas tell you only half-jeeringly that "a new house is completed every five minutes"), they figured in the second biennial exhibition of the Modern Art Museum of São Paulo.

Is such a cultural event the concern of any but artists and intellectuals? In this world of "cold war," of efforts to capture loyalties and allegiances, of dollar diplomacy, are such cultural activities a strategic part of foreign policy?

If you had been in São Paulo, especially the week before the opening, you would have been convinced that a great many countries care a very great deal about such international art festivals. Big Brazilian industrialists (like Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, who originated the idea and contributed generously from his own pocket to the biennial) realized that this occasion brought Brazil the kind of international prestige that it seeks, and, as host, Brazil was justly pleased that almost all of its invitations had been accepted.

The guests not only accepted but you were aware of the dedicated—and often frenetic—effort of most of them to put their best foot forward. They respect modern art at home; it had extra importance abroad. Especially for the Europeans, this seemed a chance to impress the New World with the fact that there could be good neighbors across the Atlantic, perhaps more cultivated, too. For the Latin-American countries, it seemed a golden opportunity to try to show Europe they were not backward barbarians overshadowed by a powerful neighbor.

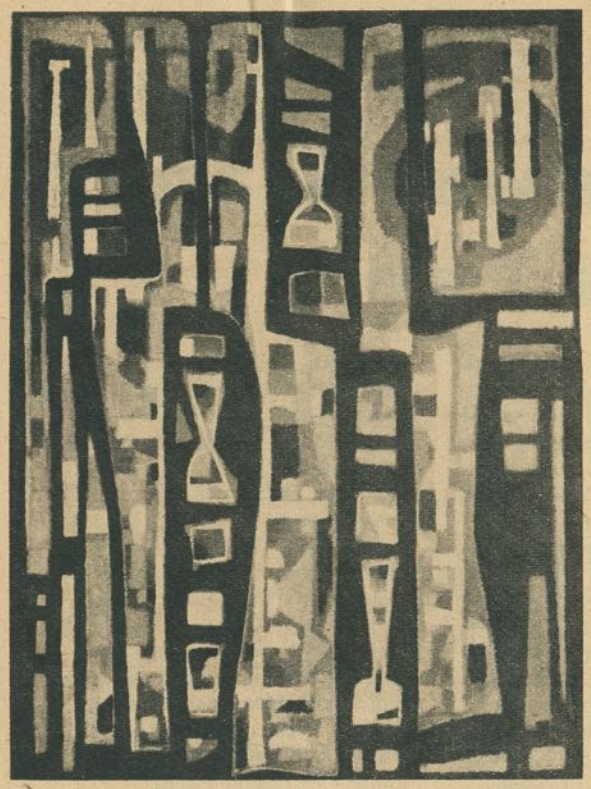
The thirty-nine guests, with the exception of those from the United States, were sent with the official blessing of their Governments and most of the latter paid at least part of the cost which acceptance of the invitation involved. Ministries of Foreign Relations, Ministries of Public Education, Societies for Cultural Relations, the British Arts Council—the details differed, but appropriate permanent agencies made arrangements and official sponsorship lent prestige to the offerings. In Brazil, embassy and consular offices were primed to lend not only helping hands but, more significantly, their stripe-trousered, homburg-hatted presences at all the social and diplomatic occasions which were connected with the exhibition.

INTERESTINGLY, with a few conspicuous exceptions, officialdom sanctioned avant-garde expression in the work chosen for the exhibit, aware apparently that international critics and the international jury would pay this the most heed. And recognition was what each ardently sought. The commissioners of the various nations were frantically busy, not only hanging and rehanging paintings, installing and reinstalling sculptures, but also, as if charged with *(Continued on Page 36)*

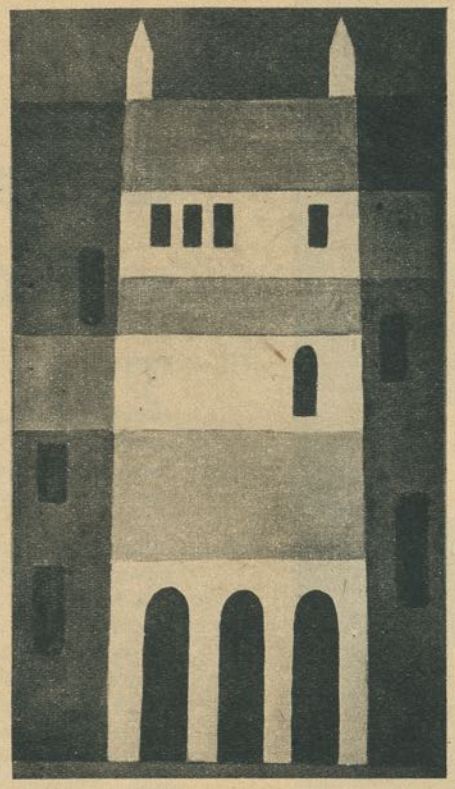
ALINE B. LOUCHHEIM, associate art editor, is no stranger to international exhibits. She won first prize for art criticism in Venice.

HIGHLIGHTS OF BRAZIL'S INTERNATIONAL SHOW

YUGOSLAVIA—The point of artistic freedom as proof of Tito's break with Russia was made by showing semi-abstract expressionist work by Petar Lubarda.



FRANCE—Manessier, with abstractions like this one, glowing with rich, Rouault color, shared top foreign painting prize with Mexico's Tamayo. Abstract or avant-garde painting dominated the show.



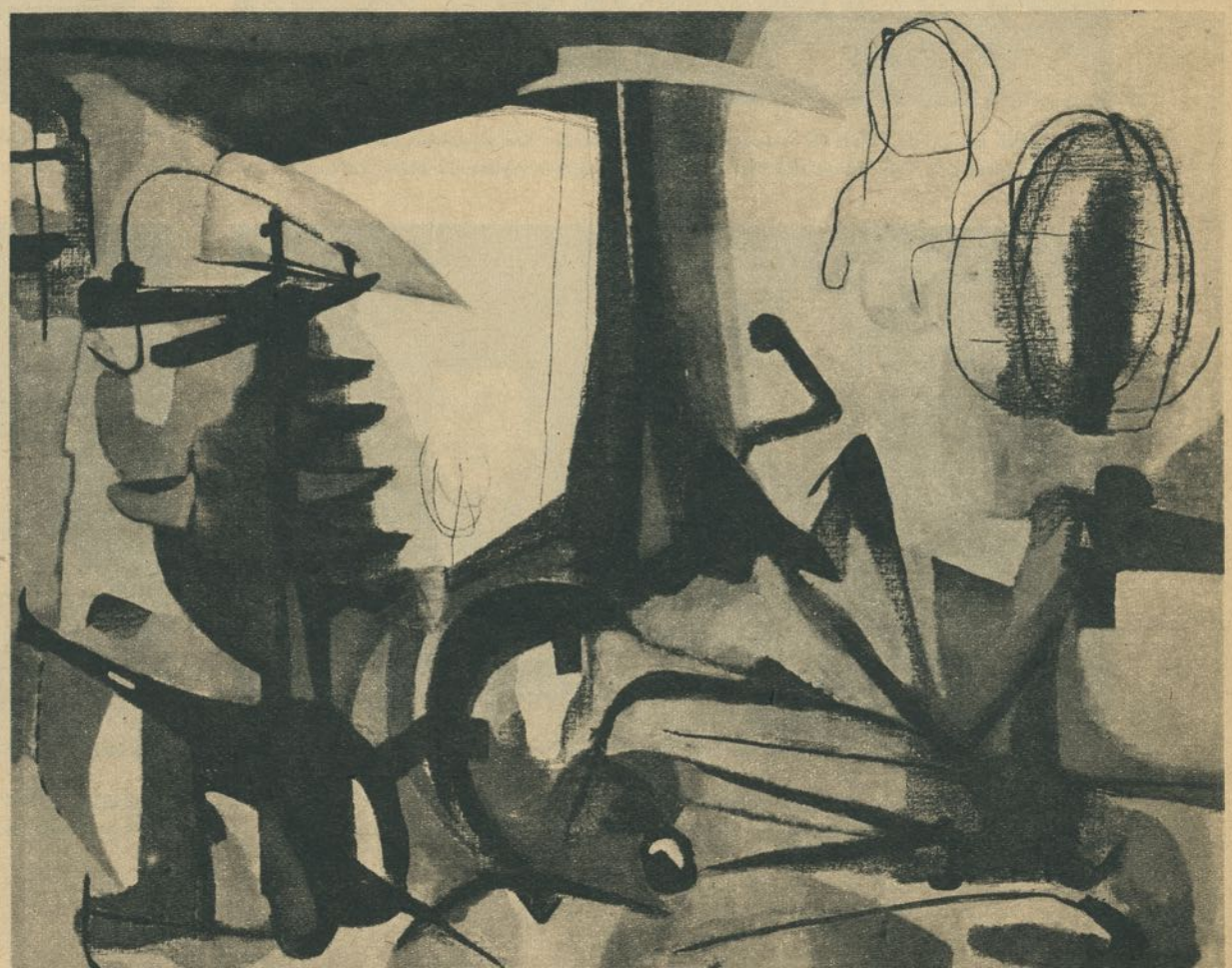
BRAZIL—Alfredo Volpi, painter of this charming, reticent picture, shared the top Brazilian painting prize with social-realist work by Di Cavalcanti.

Left—
PICASSO—Hors de combat in the prize contest, Picasso was the four-star attraction, his one-man show climaxing the French display. This "Portrait of the Painter After El Greco" was a favorite.

Right—
GRAND PRIZE—France's all-out effort to show her artistic superiority was amply rewarded. The sculptor Henri Laurens won prize for "the best artist."

Below—
ENGLAND—Although six young painters were also shown, British hopes were all justifiably pinned on Henry Moore, who captured the top sculpture prize with such works as this "Mother and Child."

Below—
ITALY—The fluent, colorful abstractions of the Venetian, Santomaso, were noteworthy in an elaborate display which included Morandi and Marini.



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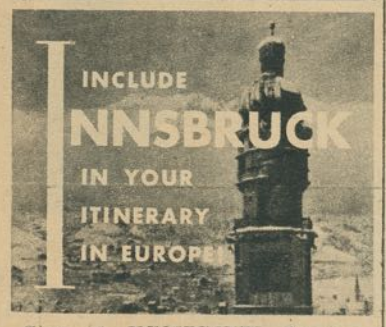

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(Continued from Page 16)

the responsibility of a serious diplomatic mission, trying to figure out how to bring home at least one of the major prizes as proof of their country's glory. They cagily tried to see which way the wind was blowing; which jury member might be counted on for what; which of the horses in their respective stables was the best bet. It mattered very much to them.

FRANCE was particularly agile, anxious to regain the artistic influence which she once held in Brazil and wise in the knowledge that culture and couturiers give France special distinction. With the single-minded energy of a mother launching a debutante daughter, the French commissioner explained, expounded and plumped for French superiority. The effort was superfluous: France had made an all-out effort and her exhibition was a galaxy of riches that spoke eloquently for itself. The other big countries — Italy, England — also made calculated bids for attention and prizes.

But the smaller ones were not to be outdone. The cultural arena is one of the few in which they can compete on equal terms with the big powers. Holland scrubbed and rescrubbed the walls with white paint to show off to best advantage a remarkably astute selection. The Austrian commissioner, shyly handing out invitations to a cocktail party sponsored by his embassy, helped call attention to the exceedingly interesting offering from his native land. When contemporary production seemed somewhat inferior certain nations cannily brought in famous names as sure-fire attractions; thus, Germany adopted Paul Klee; Norway depended on Munch; Belgium was bolstered by Ensor.

ONE country in particular realized how emphatically art can make a point. Yugoslavia, keenly aware that the Western World queries how philosophically deep the break with Russia is, shrewdly eschewed the overlife-size bronze of Tito and the academic depictions of peasants happily toiling in flower-strewn fields which dominated the Yugoslavian pavilion in the Venice international show three years ago. Here all its eggs were put effectively in one modern basket—the work of Petar Lubarda. It was perfectly clear that these semiabstract, expressionist and extremely forceful works indicated a freedom of expression and a modern idiom which (at least before the potential shift of cultural line under Malenkov) would not have been acceptable in the Soviet Union. But lest there be some misunderstanding, Yugoslavia also sent

BRAZIL—"Calendar of Eternity" by Maria, outstanding in sculpture group.

the bereted artist himself and a young, articulate journalist-public relations man who told you that Lubarda had also painted a mural in the Yugoslavian Congress Building.

The climax of national pride, of international sympathies and antagonisms and of frantic desire for prizes came when the international jury—ten foreigners and four Brazilians—began its deliberations. Leaks from the jury room revealed such blunt declarations as that of the member who, when called upon to decide between two artists tied for a prize, allegedly said, "As a German, I can do nothing but vote for the German." But any art-world person need only look at the list of prizewinners to realize the extent of pressures, deals and bloc voting.

What of the United States in all this? Artistically, we could certainly hold up our heads. Our main drawing card was the exhibition of "mobiles" by Alexander Calder, perhaps the most original, personal and "American" statement in modern art. Whether one agrees or not with the choice of our painters, draftsmen and printmakers, certainly their work compared favorably with the wares from abroad, and as a total exhibit—with such few exceptions as Mexico's Tamayo room—outshone the other nations of the New World.

MOREOVER, our host paid us the special compliment of giving us the most prominent place in the Pavilion of the Western Hemisphere and accorded Calder one of the two rooms of honor (the other going to Picasso).

But what kind of impression did we make?

In the first place, everyone was aware that our exhibition was not sponsored by our Government. They knew not only that it had been selected by the Museum of Modern Art and installed by its director, René d'Harnoncourt, who served as the American commissioner, but also that it had been paid for out of that institution's Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Although certain members of the State Department came to the official opening as individuals, the American Ambassador neither appeared nor sent a duly authorized delegate to stand with and formalize a receiving line in the American exhibition as his colleagues did with great show for the other leading countries. (One Brazilian cynically remarked, "He's probably playing golf. Isn't that what Americans in public life do?")

UNFORTUNATELY, the lack of official sponsorship surprised neither Europeans nor South Americans; they all speak quite openly of our woeful indifference to culture and specifically of the attitude of our Congress and State Department toward modern art. Without being hypersensitive, one cannot help feeling that certain foreigners are rather delighted with our official Philistinism. It reinforces the accusation that we are cultural barbarians interested only in dollars and materialism. They know that our attitude offends most of the nations whose friendship we seek and emphasizes the impression that we believe we can "buy" friendship and alliances.

Those foreigners who are friendly to us deplore our official attitude. They watch the Communists capitalize on it and are powerless to defend us. No, they were not surprised—neither the Europeans nor the South Americans in São Paulo; they did not find the experience unique. They have met it in many places and in many guises. But one wound was still especially sore: whereas the embassies of other foreign groups in São Paulo have contributed something to the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of the city, the United States, with the largest and richest population there, gave a smiling, curt refusal to any such official cultural gesture.

AS an American one finds one's self in a dilemma. On the one hand, one would like to see our Government accord the dignity, respect and sponsorship to the activities in modern art which other nations hold dear and important. On the other hand, one hesitates. One remembers vividly the virtual inquisition to which Congress subjected members of the State Department in 1946 when the latter sent a moderately "modern" art exhibition abroad. One thinks of the prevailing, violent antagonism of the majority of Congress toward modern art today. (Ironically, whereas the Congressional Record contains many damnations of abstract art as part of a disruptive Communist plot, in Brazil, when the social-realist Communist painters want to castigate the Brazilian abstract art which they hate with the worst possible epithet, they call it "Arte Americana.")

So, one hesitates. Is it worse to lose caste because our State Department eschews official sponsorship of international activity in modern art or to make fools of ourselves by sending abroad the kind of art which would safely please our Congress?

Obviously, there are two other solutions. The first represents only a stop-gap. It would mean simply that the State Department take the risk of overtly and enthusiastically supporting those exhibitions which have been chosen and circulated by such respected and competent private, non-profit groups as the Museum of Modern Art and the American Federation of Art. The second, and more desirable, solution would be a re-examination of the whole problem of our international cultural relations to the end that the State Department could have a well-organized, adequately financed program of cultural relations run by experts in the fields of all arts in which contemporary expression would not be taboo.

PERHAPS foreign nations, who resent having to accept our aid and to acknowledge our power, will always find grounds for criticism. But one of the ways in which we might gradually turn reluctant and uneasy military allies into friends would be to earn their respect for our contemporary culture. We can never do this if we are officially indifferent to their cultural efforts and if we remain officially antagonistic to our own most advanced, imaginative and best achievements in modern art and modern architecture.