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ART

An Artist Round When All Was Square

By DAVID SHIREY

KATONAH

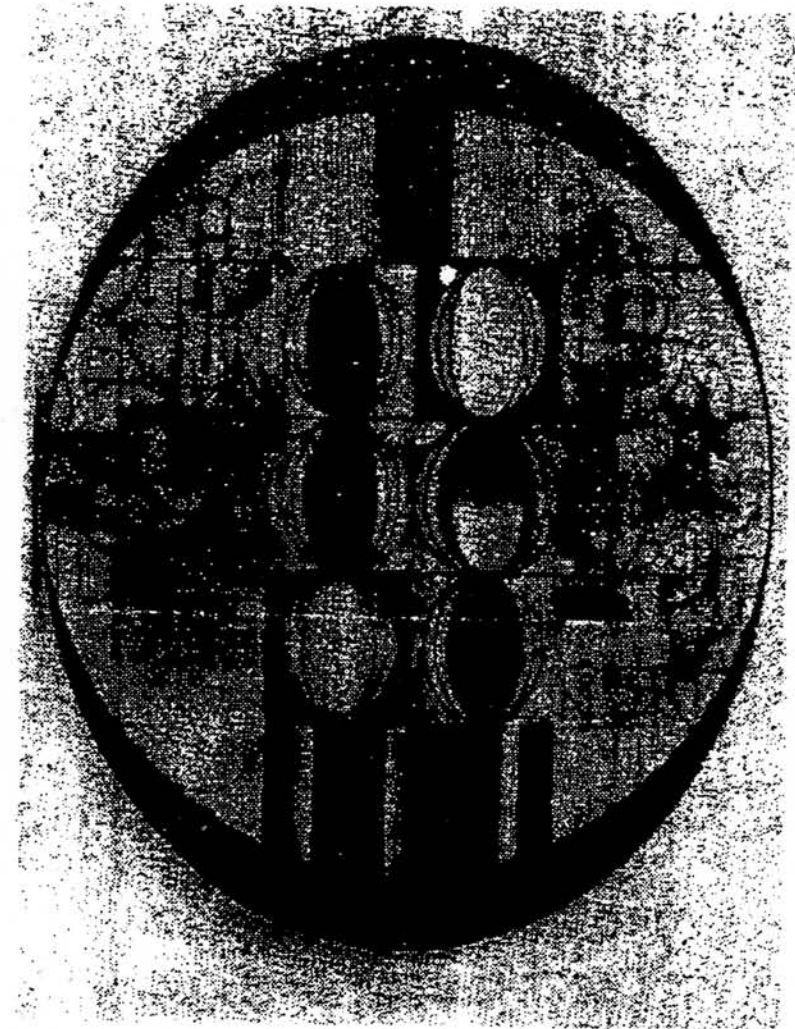
TODAY, shaped canvases are very much a fixture in modern art. In fact, canvases whose shapes are anything but the standard rectangle have become somewhat commonplace. But when Edward Giobbi began making his shaped canvases nearly 20 years ago, they were patently new to the art world — opening eyes to fresh pictorial possibilities.

Mr. Giobbi is currently the subject of an exhibition at the Katonah Gallery, and his preoccupation with shapes in both canvases and sculpture is still markedly apparent. Although his once-revolutionary shaped creations might not now cause us to start because of their divergence from the norm, they still fascinate because of the excitement they bring to the work. It is not an excitement derived from the kind of gimmicky characteristic of many shaped works, but a genuine excitement derived from the energy, vitality and impact of the shapes.

Most of the sculptures in the exhibition are forceful constructions, strongly appealing in their straightforward simplicity. The canvases are another matter. Mr. Giobbi's experimentation is not only with the shapes of his canvases, but also the shapes within the canvases. They are often tough, not easily understood visual propositions, but perceiving and comprehending them is well worth the effort.

There are examples in the exhibition that are confounding in their compositional complexity. They have too much going on at the same time and this excessive activity weakens rather than strengthens the effects. Yet, in most cases, the artist is well aware of his objective, and no matter how complex the canvas is, he delivers striking results.

What means does he use to achieve this? Primarily a rigorous sense of structure. Like a master builder, the artist can place ovals within ovals within squares, heart shapes next to concentric circles and curving cylindrical forms next to rectangles with triangles somewhere, too, and they, surpris-



'Rape of Europa, No. 2,' charcoal on paper on canvas, 1968, by Edward Giobbi, at the Katonah Gallery

ingly, mesh into a coherent unity. Our vision is lured here and there, intrigued by this shape or that, but all the details are finally subsumed into a whole.

The unity is attained through a master plan of geometry. One dominant shape will prevail over all those — ordering, containing and simplifying. In the canvases luminous lights against bold darks serve as an effective counterpoint to ambitious visual vigor. Also, repetition of the same or similar

shapes gives a sense of measure and control to these works.

What emerges from the paintings, which are drawings and collages done with charcoal and pastel on paper and then mounted on canvas, is a dynamic rush of movement. Although some of the works are quietly balanced, others cause our eyes to shift position rapidly from one visual event to the other. Geometric shapes appear to surge, thrust, rotate and veer.

The sculptures are more staid, even if they have a vertical emphasis that makes them look as if they are growing. They are light miniature buildings in which blocks are piled upon blocks and often capped by a pyramid, cylinder or other forms. They may suggest bell towers, churches or some other religious structures but they are really architectural fantasies of Mr. Giobbi.

Indeed, the artist calls both the paintings and sculptures "architectural visions." The paintings have an affinity to windows, arches and other architectural components, but their relationship to buildings is much less pronounced than in the sculptures. Both, however, are characterized by strong visionary quality, sometimes seeming to refer to buildings in the past or suggesting ones of the future.

Mr. Giobbi, who lives and works in Katonah, has said that his art has been appreciably influenced by Italian architecture, especially medieval and Renaissance architecture. One can see how that is possible in its attachment to order, balance, proportion as well as texture, love of materials and elegance in the most positive sense.

But it seems to me that its closest kinship in Italian architecture is to the Mannerist constructions of the 16th century. Like the Mannerist work, Mr. Giobbi's paintings and sculptures are dynamically alive, constantly keeping us guessing, surprising us, keeping us on the move, and keeping us thinking. That's no small feat.

The exhibition runs through July 9. The Katonah Gallery is at 23 Bedford Road and is open Tuesday through Thursday from 2 to 5 P.M.; on Friday and Saturday from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M., and Sunday from 1 to 5 P.M.

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