

ARTS & LETTERS

*'The Last Supper'
Needs Saving*

"Will Italy Save the Last Supper?" by Milton Gendel, in *ARTnews* (Summer 1979), 121 Garden St., Marion, Ohio 43302.

Leonardo da Vinci's famous mural, *The Last Supper* (1495-97), has never adhered well to the wall in the Dominican friars' refectory of the church of St. Maria delle Grazie in Milan. Dissatisfied with the technique of painting frescoes on wet plaster (because he was a slow worker), Leonardo experimented with an oil-tempera medium that failed to penetrate and bond with the plaster, as fresco does.

Today, the 28½-by-15-foot painting is in desperate need of repair, reports Gendel, Rome correspondent for *ARTnews*.

The picture is afflicted by dirt and damp mold, and its paint is flaking. Efforts to preserve it are mired in a controversy that awaits resolution by the Italian art bureaucracy. Giovanni Urbani, head of Italy's National Institute of Art Restoration, wants to install air conditioning in the refectory to provide a stable, dry, clean atmosphere. But the retired superintendent of Milan's monuments, Gisberto Martelli, an influential figure who occupies an apartment above the refectory, opposes air conditioning; it would, he argues, generate too much noise and vibration. He prefers an air filtering system and a \$1 million rehabilitation of the rectory building. Martelli would also require that visitors remove their shoes before entering the building.

The Last Supper has endured trying times before, Gendel writes. In the 17th century, friary monks cut a door through the wall, eliminating forever part of the tablecloth and Christ's feet. And over the centuries, several well-meaning craftsmen have repainted portions of the mural in an effort to preserve the composition. Much of their handiwork has yet to be removed. Of the masterpiece's famed perspective background, 80 percent is painted over, and "only about 20 percent of it salvageable," according to Urbani. The figures of Christ and his apostles have fared better—a mere 15 percent of their overpainting requires removal.

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*New Leaders
for Thai Rebels*

"Thailand's Revolutionary Insurgency: Changes in Leadership Potential" by David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, in *Asian Survey* (Apr. 1979), University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif. 94720.

When protesting Bangkok university students toppled Thailand's corrupt military regime in October 1973 and saw it replaced by a parliamentary democracy, the small Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was as surprised as anyone else. The students, long passive, were sud-

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denly the country's chief political activists. Their new strength attracted the CPT's interest.

Before 1973, Thai Communists were hobbled by the government's rural anti-guerrilla operations and by the arrest of several key members in 1968. It concentrated its efforts in the hinterland, write Morell and Samudavanija, who teach political science at Princeton and at Thailand's Chulalongkorn University, respectively. But, after 1973, in the new liberal climate, the party was free to proselytize among the students. Its agents distributed party publications on the campuses and emphasized to student leaders that the egalitarian society they envisioned could only be achieved by violent revolt.

Impatient with the slow pace of reform and alarmed by increasing violence from the Right, students from Bangkok began visiting the 250 Communist-controlled hamlets in the Northeast, North, and South. By 1975, some 1,000 had gotten weapons training and indoctrination at remote camps. Student publications soon attacked "U.S. imperialism," "foreign capitalists and investors," and "the liberal democratic forms of government," terms borrowed from party rhetoric. In 1975, official estimates put CPT membership at 10,000 insurgents and 7,000 civilian supporters, many of them students. When a 1976 coup returned the military to power, still others joined the Communists hiding out in the hills.

A Red takeover is not imminent; in Thailand (pop. 40 million), military repression has hampered activity. But the authors claim that the party's prospects have been vastly improved by the influx of energetic young ex-students capable of formulating strategy and coordinating rural guerrillas and urban dissidents. "To a great extent," they conclude, "the future of Thailand now rests in their hands."

Sadat's Egypt

"The Struggle for Egypt's Soul" by Fouad Ajami, in *Foreign Policy* (Summer 1979), P.O. Box 984, Farmingdale, N.Y. 11737.

A reluctance to realistically assess the future pervades Anwar el-Sadat's Egypt. Strongly conscious of their roots in the Middle East, Egyptians have become isolated from other Arab nations and increasingly dependent on the United States and the West.

Egyptians have long considered their homeland the leader of the Arab world, writes Ajami, a Princeton political scientist. They point to its relatively developed economy, sophisticated cities, and a history of civilization unmatched by its neighbors. The country's self-confidence was shattered, however, by defeat in Gamal Abdel Nasser's 1967 Six-Day War against Israel. The war was supposed to cement Egypt's leadership in the region. Instead, it resulted in Israeli occupation of the Sinai and a national "identity crisis" that simmered on until Sadat ordered the assault on Israel in 1973. No matter, Ajami says, that Sadat had to call on Henry Kissinger to save Egypt's Third Army after the