
ARTS & LETTERS

Numbers Game

"Cultural Inflation" by Marion Muller, in *The New Leader* (Sept. 25, 1978), 212 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10010.

Americans are being inundated with culture. The mass marketing of art through highly-publicized special exhibits (e.g., the *Mona Lisa* in 1963, Michelangelo's *Pieta* in 1964, the "Treasures of Tutenkhamun" in 1978) has drawn such enormous crowds that the viewing public seldom has more than a brief glimpse of what is being shown. (More than 1 million people pay to see the "Tut" exhibit at Manhattan's Metropolitan Museum of Art while the museum's own superb Egyptian galleries are virtually ignored.)

"The current trend toward wholesale dissemination of culture does not permit understanding on a profound level," says art critic Muller. Concentration on the sheer number of visitors, she writes, is likely to worsen the already excessive emphasis by museums on what is safe and conventional.

Museum directors are being forced by tight budgets to draw the public any way they can, and the public can hardly be blamed for responding to the excitement of heavily-promoted cultural exhibits. The role of the responsible critic in this situation, Muller says, is to provide historical perspective (and thereby "neutralize the hysteria"), to encourage high aesthetic standards, and to remind the layman that spending an entire hour with one Cezanne painting is a more valuable personal experience than spending a half-hour with 100 Cezanne paintings.

The New Wave of Sound

"The Second Coming of Sound" by Charles Schreger, in *Film Comment* (Sept.-Oct. 1978), 1865 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023.

With the release of *The Jazz Singer* by Warner Bros. in October, 1927, Hollywood launched the era of talking pictures, and the nation's ailing film industry began to revive. Now, America once again seems "sound-obsessed," writes Schreger, a reporter for *Variety* in Hollywood.

Younger audiences (the 18-30 year olds who also buy record albums and expensive stereo equipment), are demanding films that offer audio as well as visual excellence. Innovative filmmakers (Robert Altman, Michael Cimino, Francis Coppola, Milos Forman, Stanley Kubrick, Alan J. Pakula, and Steven Spielberg) have responded by introducing "the second Sound Revolution."

Robert Altman is the filmmaker who has probably experimented most with sound to gain heightened realism. As early as *Countdown* (1967), he employed overlapping dialogue, or, as he calls it, "live sound effects." He used eight-track recording systems and wired each per-