

# Art On: New Frontiers in Erotic Art



JOHN ZIEGENHAGEN

Gregory Battcock, who so ably surveys Erotic Art in the following pages, may be known to some of our readers through his column in *GAY*, in which he talks about people, food, hanging out with Jill Johnston, and sometimes even art. Despite this dubious association with our sister paper, Gregory has managed to make a name for himself in what used to be known as the Avant Garde. He has chronicled recent developments in art in his books—*New Art*, *Minimal Art*, and his forthcoming book, *Why Art* (all published by E.P. Dutton); as a special correspondent for *Arts* magazine; and as an Associate Professor of Art History at Wm. Patterson College of New Jersey. But rather than read about Gregory, why don't you read what he has to say about Erotic Art?

BY GREGORY BATTCOCK

Gallery 10, at 138 West 10th Street, is one of a growing number of galleries in New York offering art exhibitions on the theme of Erotic Art. So far, none of the galleries has attempted to separate Erotic from Art; none has offered an exhibition of pure erotica or, in simpler terminology, pornography. All the exhibitions on the theme held during the past several years have viewed erotica as a stylistic exercise rather than a question of sexual arousal and the new show at Gallery 10 is no exception. Unfortunately, one result of this inability to accept the erotic on its own terms is that the sculptures, silkscreens, paintings, collages and drawings are rarely, if ever, authentically erotic. They are unlikely to arouse even a hamster to anything more than mild curiosity.

At any rate, the proprietors of Gallery 10 have devised an ingenious scheme for avoiding a bust—they keep the place closed. A little note pasted to the door informs "Open 1-6 except Tuesday."

If the art works offered here (and those appearing elsewhere as well) are not especially erotic, some of them are certainly stylish, charming, professional, witty, outrageous, brilliant, informative, serious, decorative, educational, illustrative and just plain attractive. Thus the exhibit offers a lot of visual stimulation and considerable opportunity for visual speculation. There is a great deal to be learned and, in the words of LeRoi Jones, it's "educatin' by delightin'."

## WHO SHALL JUDGE?

Another unique characteristic of the Gallery 10 exhibition is that it was judged and that prizes were offered to several artists for their contributions. It has been generally assumed that the day of judged and juried art exhibitions, complete with the awarding of prizes, was pretty much finished. Such set-ups tend to reinforce hierarchal trends and elitism in artistic value judgments. Today the view that is increasingly gaining acceptance in the art world, and that is reflected in administrative reforms of several major international art exhibitions (Venice, Kassel, etc.) is one that claims art works should not be graded and evaluated like consumer appliances. Ultimately the art experience—both on the part of the artists and the viewers—is personal and relative and subjective, and therein lies the impossibility of fair evaluation and "just" judgments. In art there can be no justice; nor is there the need to dispense it.

Therefore the fact that the current exhibition subscribed to the old-fashioned "judging" procedure is, in itself, surprising, puzzling, novel, reactionary and if you want, something startlingly new. (continued on next page)





ANITA STECKEL



O. MAYLAGUA

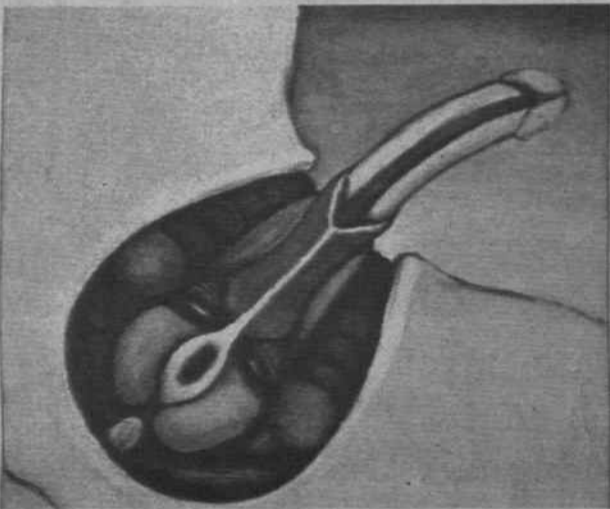


The distinguished "judges" who presumed to dispense justice at the Gallery 10—and who, no doubt, claim to "know what they like" besides knowing something about art—were Ivan Karp, art world "weatherman" who has informed one and all that super-realism is all the rage this year (and in fact he has made it all the rage by promoting a series of super-realists at his big downtown gallery); J.B. Rund, art connoisseur; Heidi Handman, managing editor of SCREW and Al Goldstein, SCREW founder and publisher who, it seems, sticks a finger into just about everything.

**SUCK MY ART**

Our distinguished judges offered awards to Eddie Louie for his handsome and rather humorous collage called *Good Humour*. With considerable wit, Louie manipulates various textural elements in startling and original juxtapositions that are distinguished for their professional execution, played-down, tongue-in-cheek subject matter, and sensitive manipulations of diverse iconographic elements that result in authentic invention and innovative imagery.

"DEMON" BY ALAN BETANCOURT



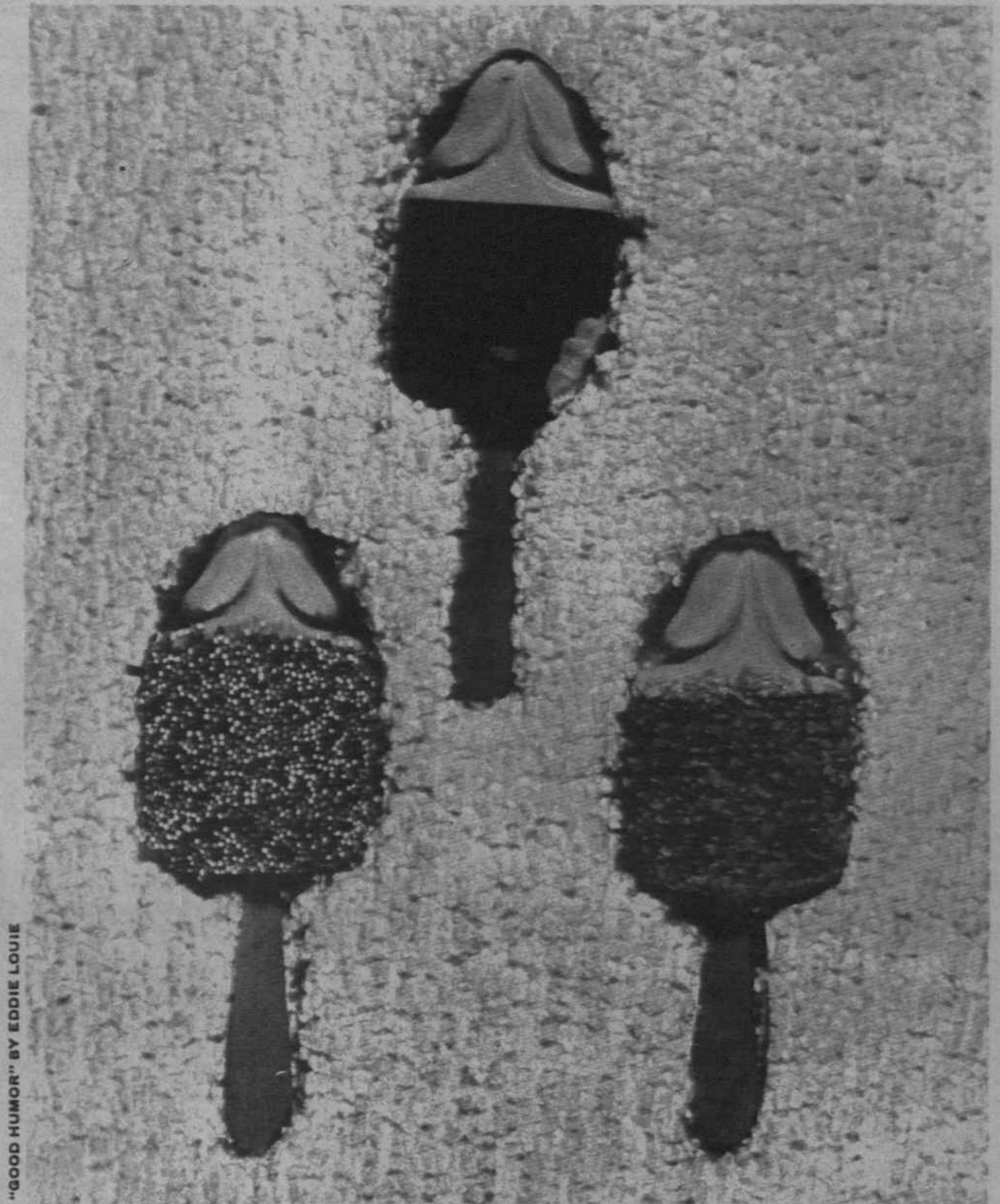
Another prize was offered (and, presumably accepted) to Alan Betancourt for *Demon*, an oil painting that is mainly a clinical, frank and introspective illustration of human organs that are seen as both exterior and anatomical phenomena. The painting isn't especially beautiful but it is frank, bold, reflective and executed with confidence and sensitivity.

A prize also went to Anne Sharp for a charming, sensual and "springlike" drawing of a reclining figure, which includes patterned fabric and fruit sections. The work will remind some viewers of the late 19th century French school in more ways than one. There is a lyrical appreciation of patterns that is not unlike the treatment pioneered by Bonnard; her voluptuous figure certainly owes its inspiration to a keen and appreciative study of the blushing, nude representations of Renoir. This is not to say the painting is merely a rehash of various post-Impressionist painterly devices. Its overall ambiance is modern and it, quite properly, deserves consideration in a modern context.

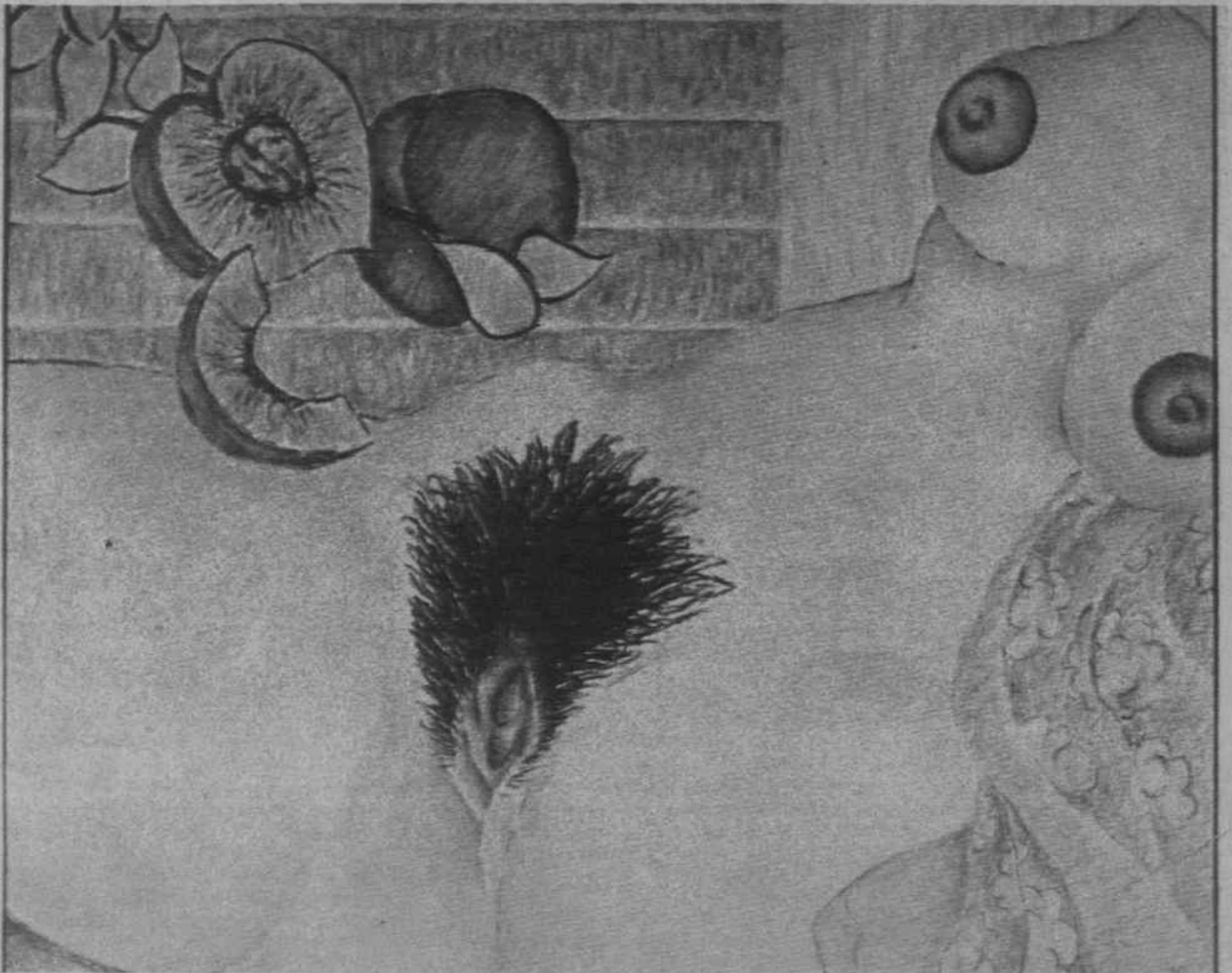
Other works in the exhibition include yet another painting by Eddie that, at least to this viewer (and his appallingly conventional sexual orientation), appears downright anti-erotic. In fact, it's the sort of thing I'd almost expect to find hanging in a reception lounge at the Salvation Army. I'm referring to his grotesque *Labial Lunch*, which is, in its own right, a serious and deeply committed art work that intelligently employs the standard and time-tested lexicon of traditional 20th Century Surrealist art. Such artists as Dali, Ernst and Tanguy spring to mind and *Labial Lunch* seems to reflect an intense study of the mechanics of Surrealism and the several Post-Freudian styles.

Some drawings by Zapata reveal an accomplished, academic technique that blends with contemporary imagery and indicates a harsh look at the posturing and gesture of various sexual activities.

Peter Cross delivers almost allegorical and deeply moral views of sex and its complex psycho-physical entanglements. His images appear within broader, simpler images and the result is tinged with irony and even a little sermonizing (as opposed to simonizing—there is no high-gloss to these works). *(continued on next page)*

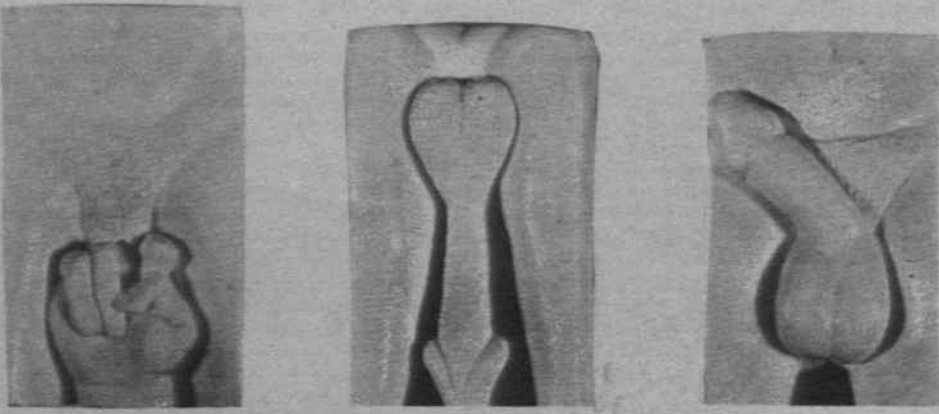


"GOOD HUMOR" BY EDDIE LOUIE



ANNE SHARP

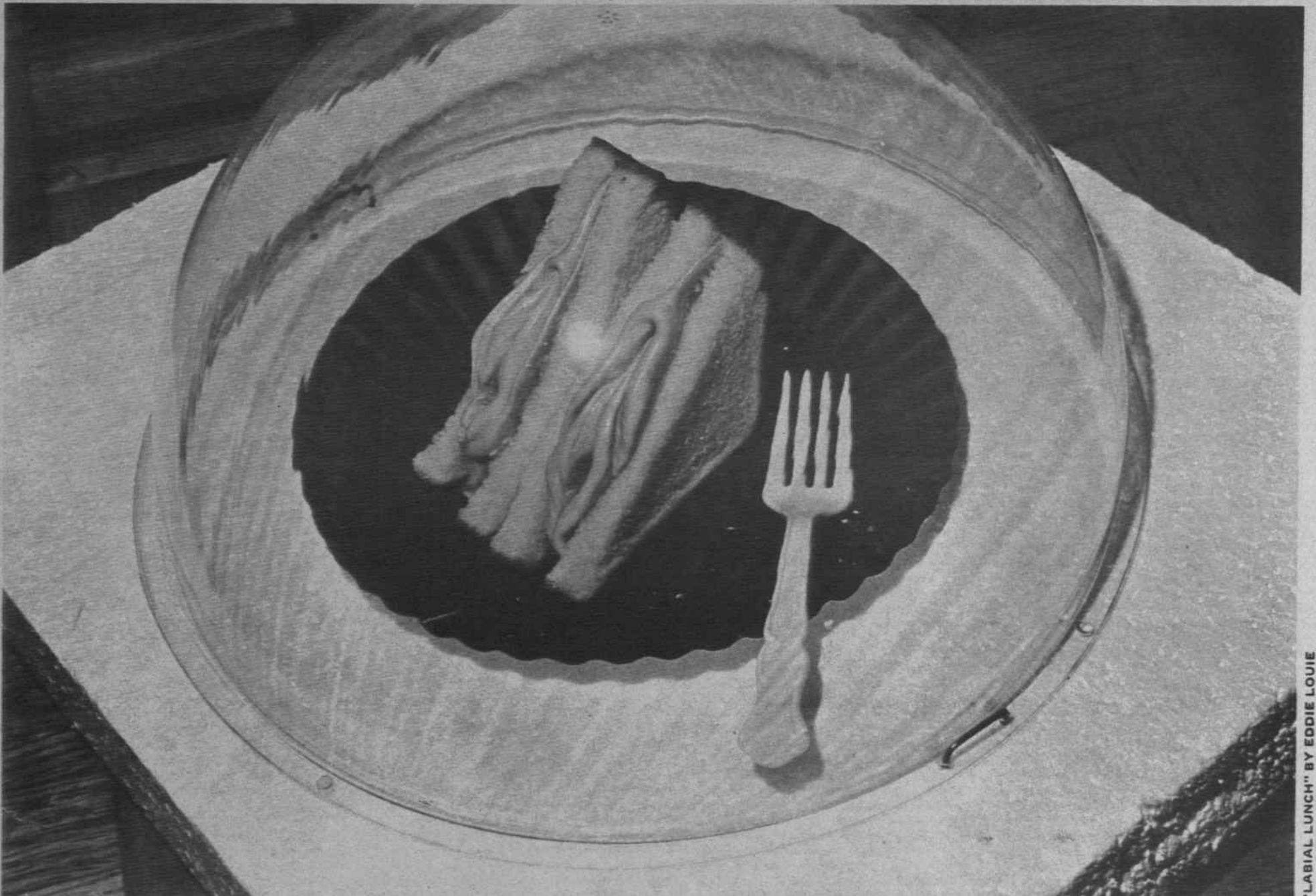




ZAPATA



"BOY" BY JACK COGHLAN



"LABIAL LUNCH" BY EDDIE LOUIE



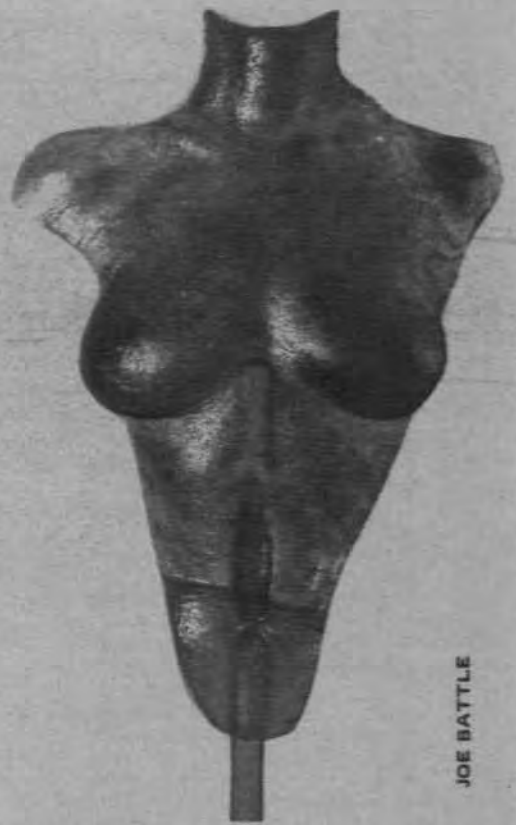
CONTEMPORARY CARAVAGGIO

A large combination of "painting-drawing" by Jack Coghlan, entitled *Boy*, illustrates two views of a young boy against a modernistic background. If you ask me, the background was a mistake, but the drawing itself is touching, humble and defiant in a charming way. It recalls the Bacchuses and *ragazzi* of Caravaggio; indeed the thought of up-dated Caravaggio is brilliant and can be accomplished in a great variety of ways. Warhol is one artist, among many contemporaries, who has accepted the challenge.

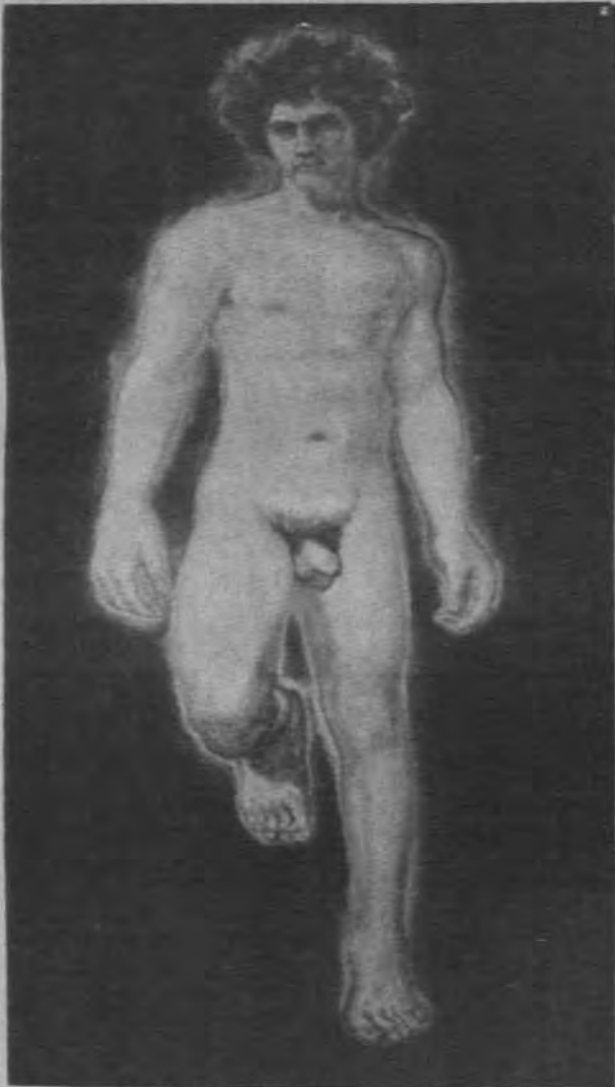
The subject of this special exhibition—erotic art—is one that deserves much more attention and should engage the imagination and energy of major scholars and institutions. Erotic art is a specific type of visual communication that accepts the so-called "prurient" instincts and that recognizes their potential as positive senses. Such art accepts the fact that such instincts exist and that they should be acknowledged, developed, and refined. Like all other instincts, when properly educated, they can enrich life, cultivate awareness and bring joy. Yet, in modern technological society they are usually denied (as are so many life instincts) or, at best, used sparingly and very hypocritically, as in commercial advertising or government and institutional propaganda.



FRANK TROTТА



JOE BATTLE

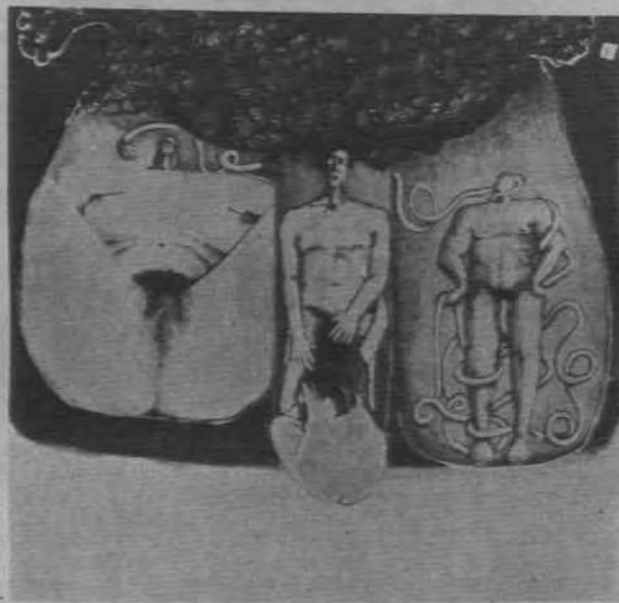


"REVELATION" BY ALAN BETANCOUBT

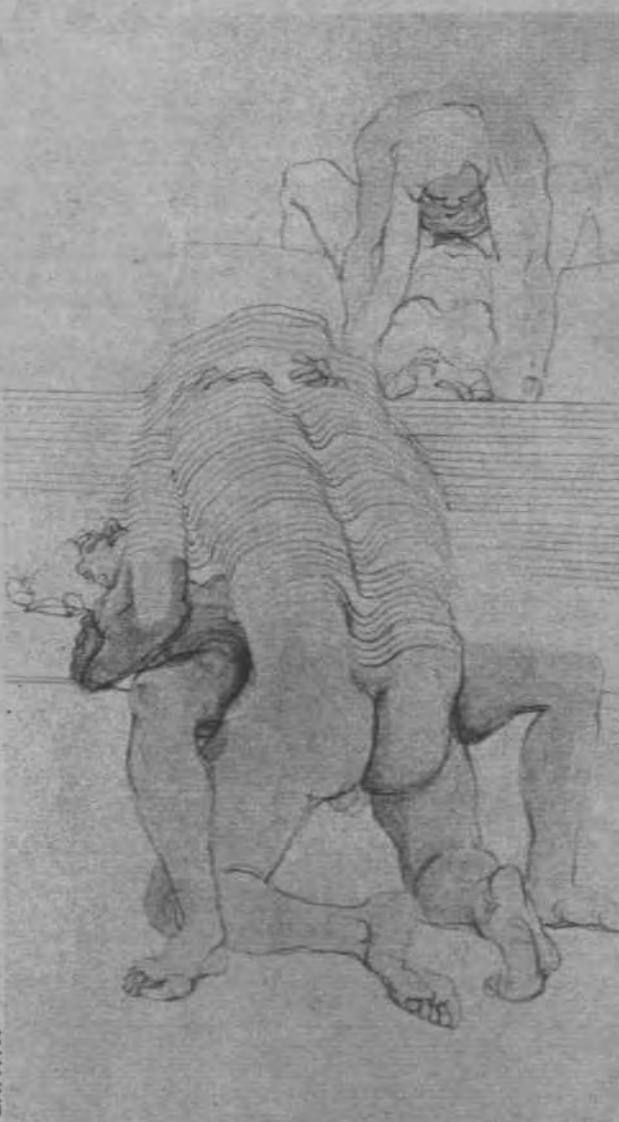
EROTIC COMMUNICATION

The diverse styles and trends included in this broad exhibition merely scratch the surface of a major communicative morphology—that of eroticism. Within the broad spectrum of visual phenomena lies an enormous store of virtually unexplored and unknown material that awaits the curiosity of the artist. The potential and vitality of eroticism within the visual communicative areas are great. Those artists who are attempting to reveal the mechanisms of the culture and the foundations of the society by exploring deeply human phenomena through the semantics of visual perception are serving all humanity and helping to construct the foundations for a new, better and more positive environment. They are engaged in a search that may result in significant contributions to the efficacy of human communication and the ability of man to understand (and indeed determine) his condition.

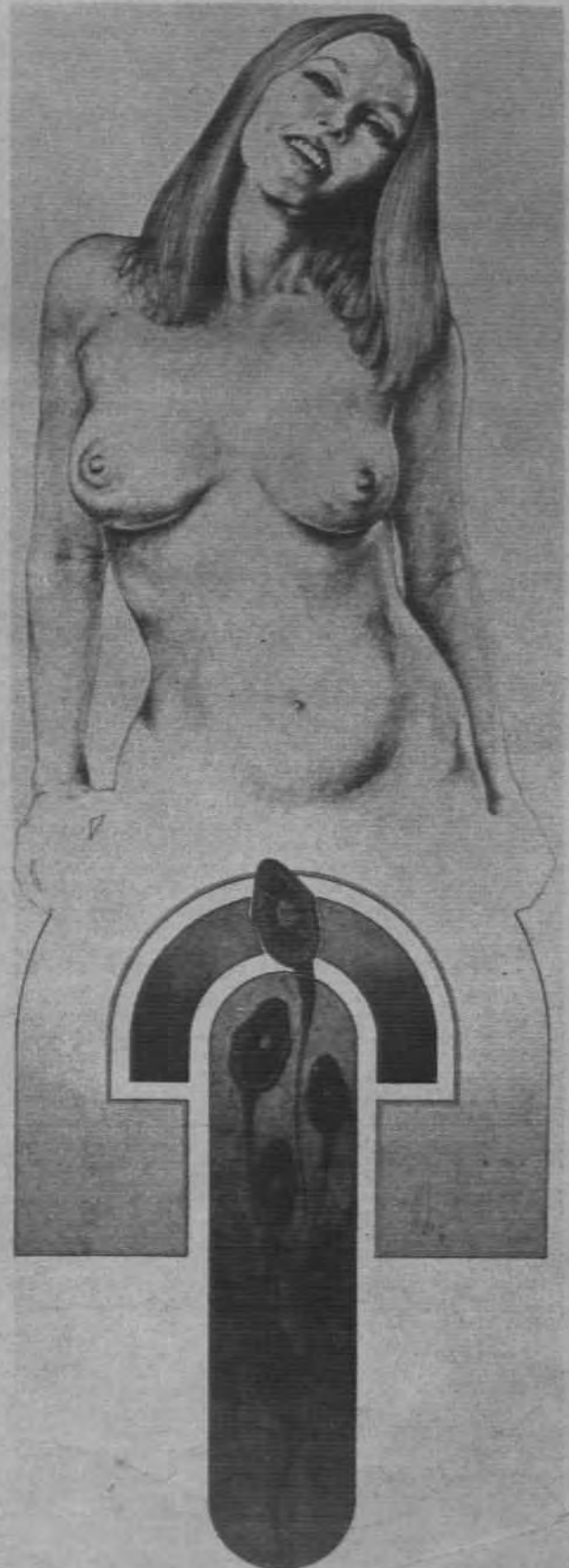
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PETER CROSS

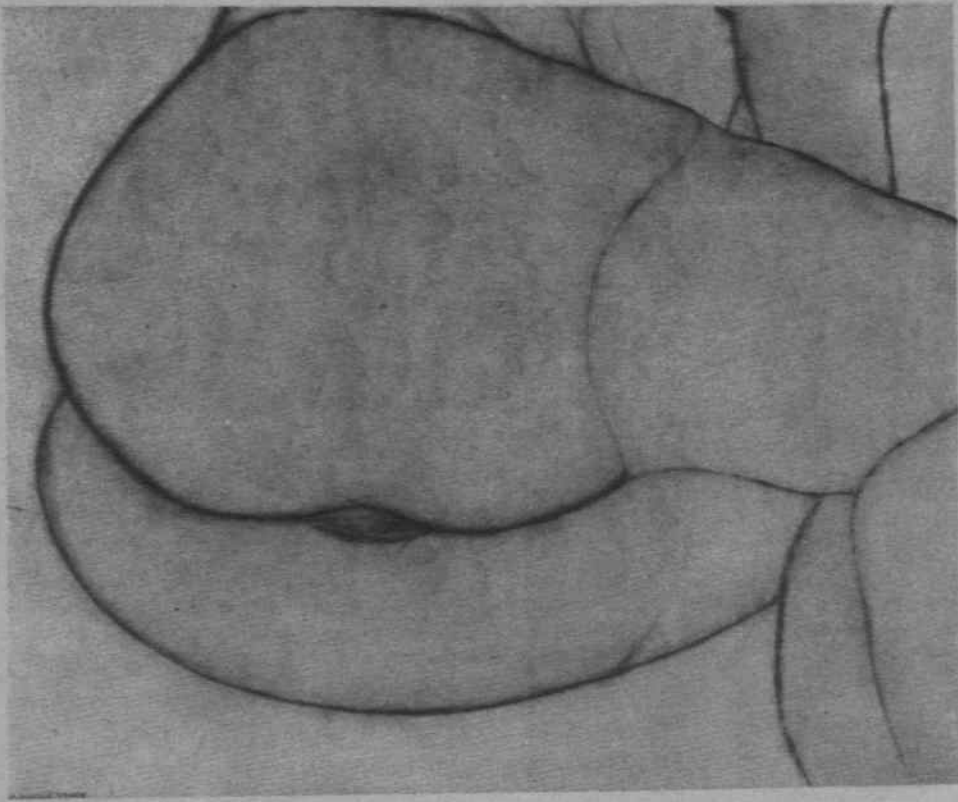


ZAPATA

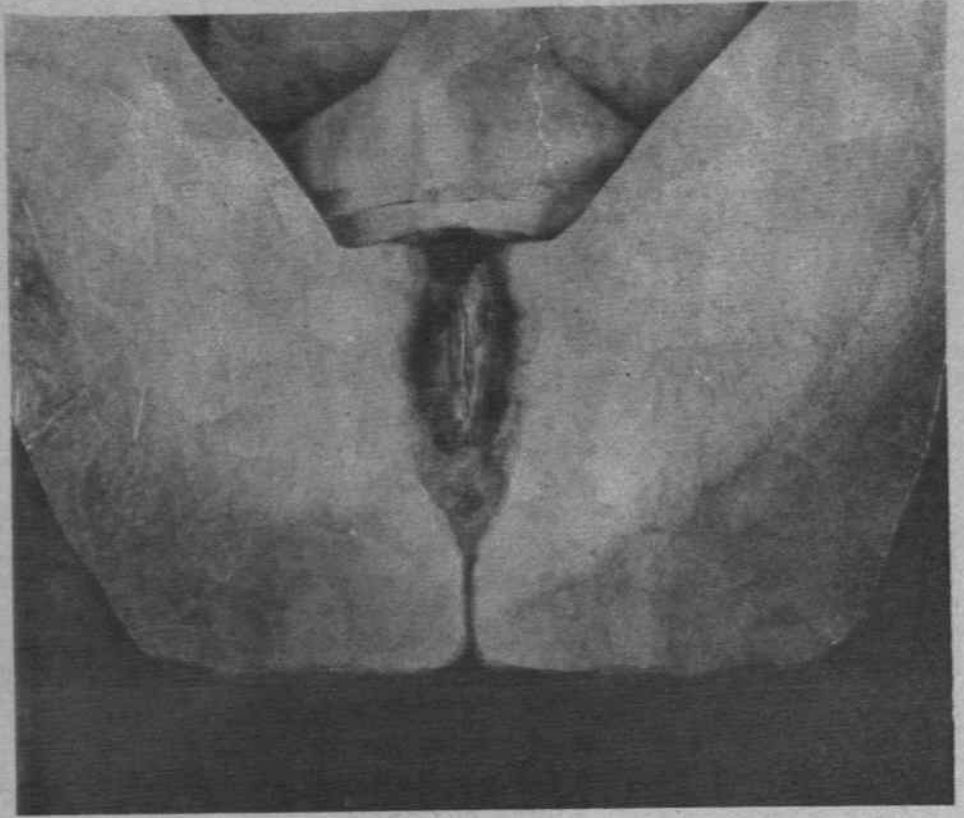


MELO





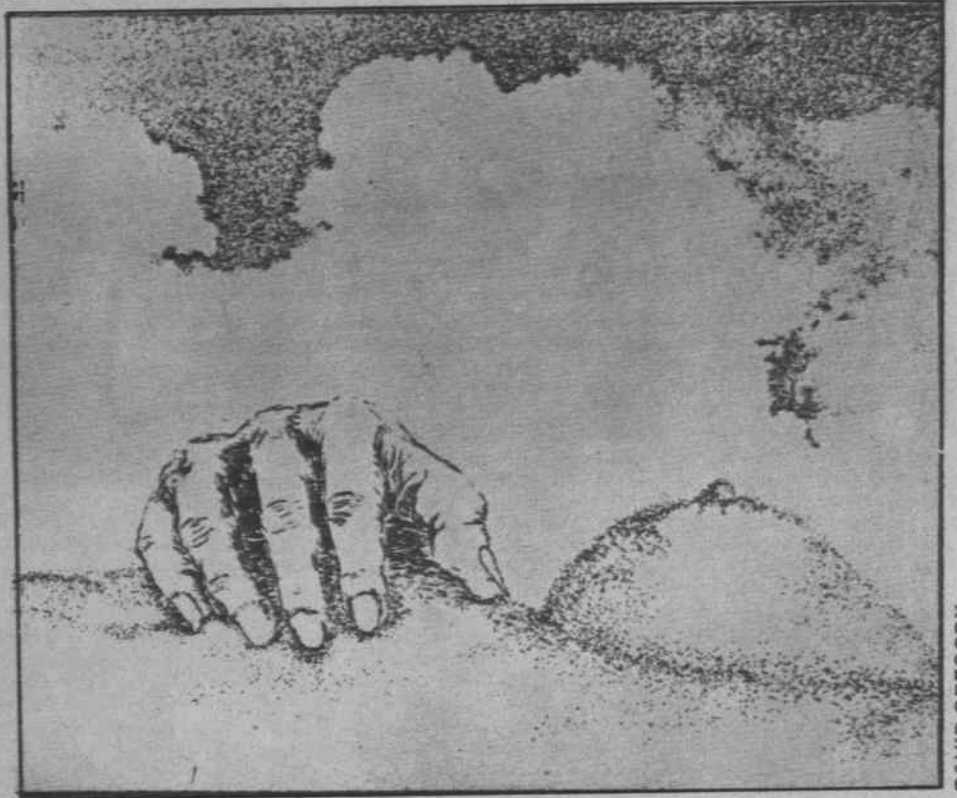
CHARLES STARK



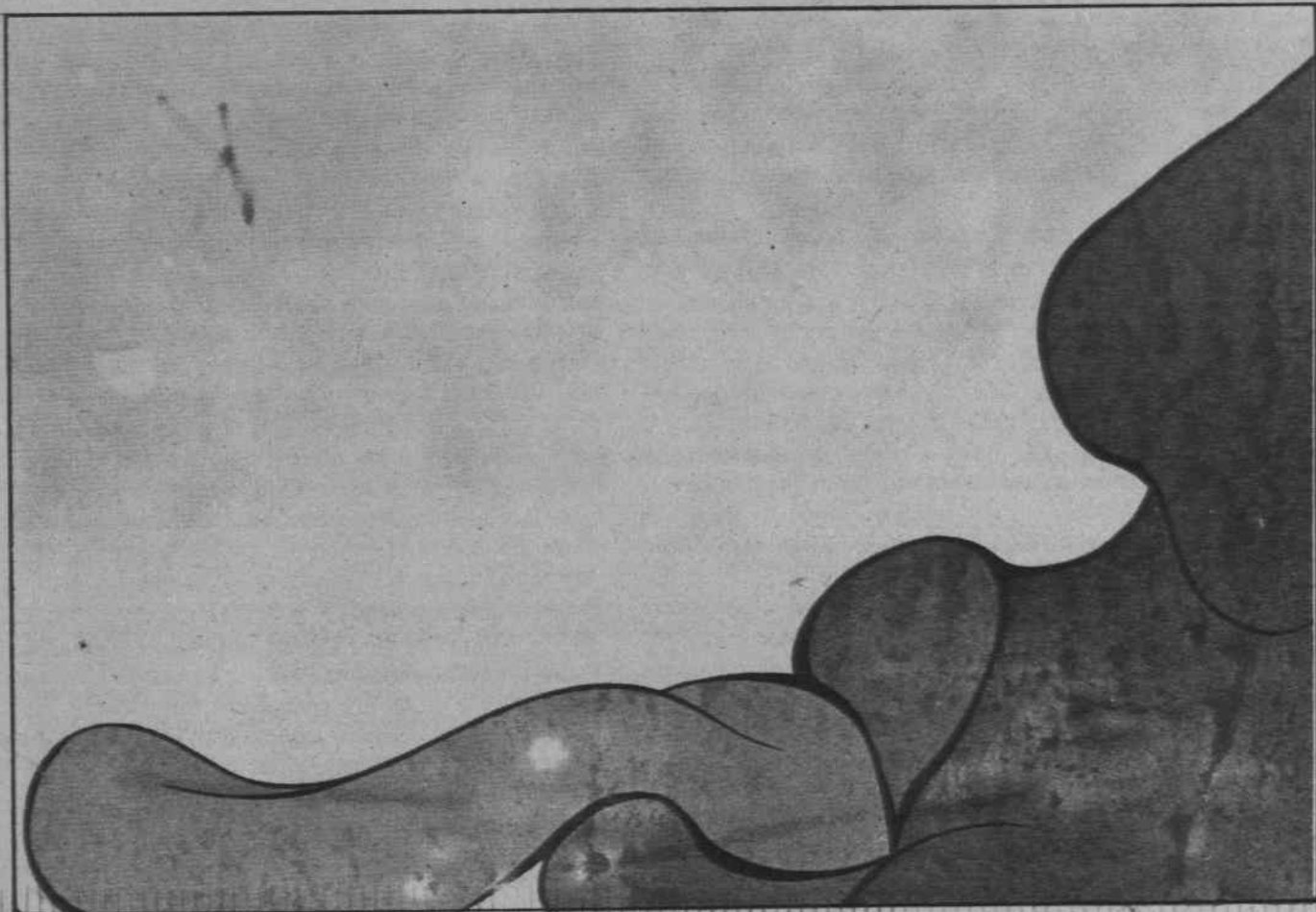
J. RENITZ



AL DILAURO



DAVID GREGORY

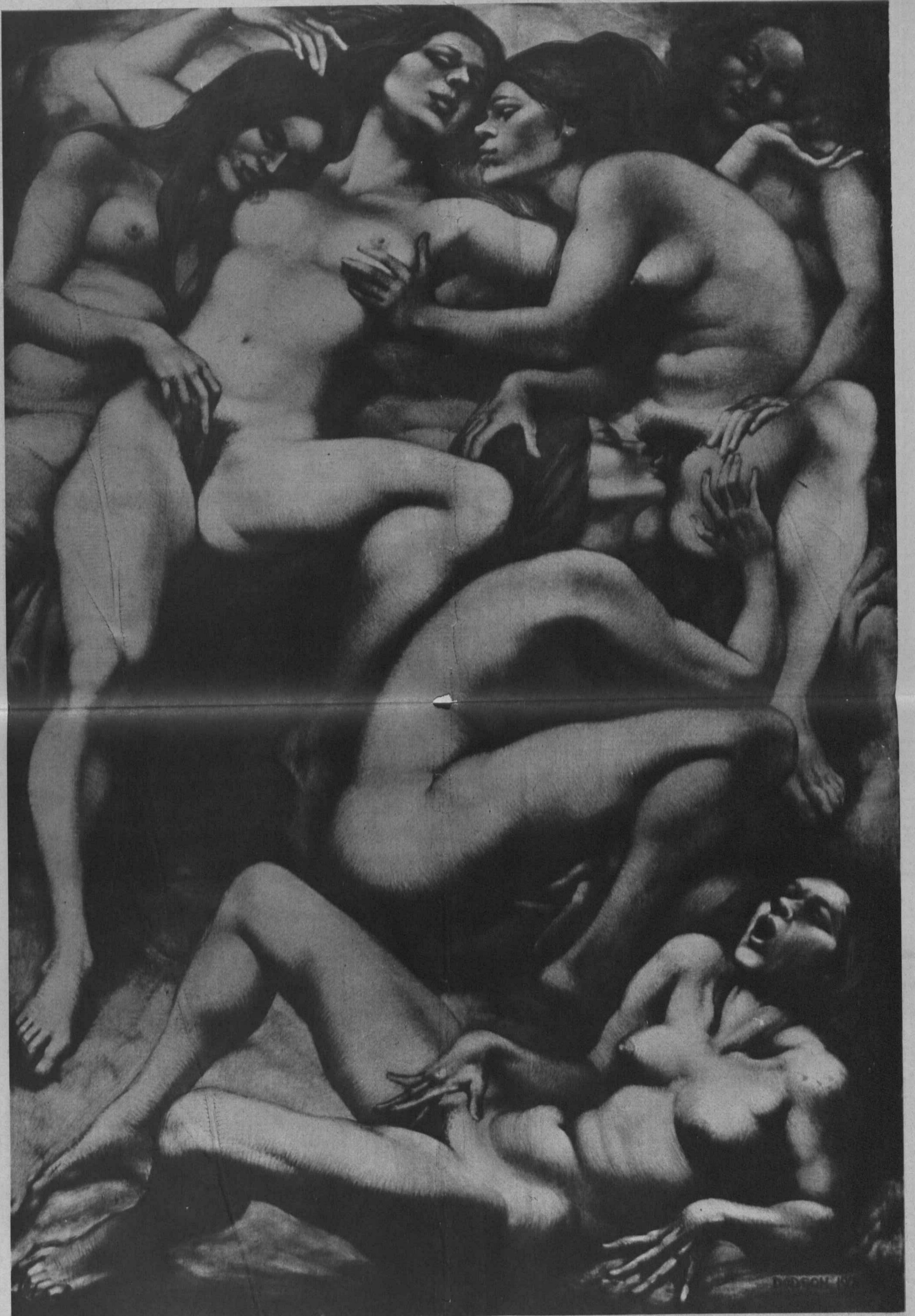


C. PANNUCCI



LONNIE YONGUE





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Betty Dodson, who is surely one of the best authentically EROTIC artists of our time, is represented in the exhibition by a major work—a painting illustrating five female nude figures. In some ways her piece is the outstanding work of the exhibition—not because it is so beautifully executed and professionally painted, but because it narrows the gap and reduces the contradic-

tions between eroticism and artistic expression. No doubt she is considered as a major artist of our time; already she is considered a prophetic figure within the genre. As erotic art develops its own identification and becomes more confident of its own position within the broad fields of visual communication, the works of Betty Dodson will achieve recognition. ©