

S. P., "Diversity of Shows," *The New York Times*, May 15 1949

## DIVERSITY OF SHOWS

Expressionism, a Cubist,  
A Haitian 'Primitive'

**T**WO artists at the Betty Parsons Gallery illustrate one of the paradoxes of modern art—that things are not what they seem. For the representational painter William Congdon sees by the light of his inner imaginative eye, while Adeline Kent, the abstract sculptor, creates her impersonal shapes from the world of visible organic forms.

Congdon paints in such a violently expressionistic manner that only the fact that his subjects, Italian and American city scenes, are perfectly recognizable keeps them from being hallucinatory and unreal. Indeed, these pictures succeed best as personal visions, soundings into the nervous life of a place, the Naples waterfront, New York at night, rather than as map-like delineations.

One night view of the Piazza in Venice is painted almost entirely in glistening wavelets of dark blue and black pigment. Out of the darkness surges an astonishing glow of color, scattering light like a pinwheel, that eventually resolves into the gaudy structure of San Marco. In another architectural view, a whole lacy Gothic facade is rendered in needlelike lines, scratched through a layer of dark paint. Light is capricious rather than logical.

What Congdon sees, in these Italian scenes, keeps the excitement under some control, but in the New York subjects the lid is off. A frenzied paint cookery succeeds the intensity of the earlier technique, and the real emotional temperature drops, despite feverish attempts to push it to higher levels. Perhaps the strange and the new are the best stimulants for such a subjective art, as they have been for other extreme manifestations of romanticism.

**MIND'S EYE:** Miss Kent is so concerned with the shapes that she is twisting, scooping, constructing, and with the paint and ornament that will adorn them that she chooses for her medium, hydrocal, a displeasing hard plaster whose only virtue lies in having no distracting separate character as a substance. Out of it she creates forms that have no direct link with the visible world, and yet succeed in suggesting emotions that they are unable to define. They seem to embody basic rhythms that only need being harnessed to natural appearances to become perfectly comprehensible. Primitive cult images are naturally recalled.