

PANEL REVIEW

Welcome to Post-Modernism

I went to this really weird panel last night at New York University called Post-modernism in Art. They had John Simon and Michael Graves and Hilton Kramer, so the place was packed, but first they had a beautiful lady with long blond hair and a really great black dress. I mean she could have been a model or something, only instead she was a doctor, because when she finished talking the moderator said, thank you Doctor Soandso. Then she sat down and only the four guys with just OK suits and maybe vests were left and the guy who was the moderator gave a speech for each one and then they talked about Picasso and George Bernard Shaw and Mies and Mallarmé and Baudelaire and Rimbaud.

First it was Hilton Kramer's turn and he came on and said how Post-Modernism is an Agenda of Stylistic Options. But maybe he hasn't been in too many galleries in Soho lately, because he didn't know it's all Neo there now. But then he said how in Post-Modernism it doesn't matter what

things look like because we don't have Aesthetics any more. Then it was Michael Graves' turn next and it was funny because *he* said, the thing about Post-Modernism in architecture is it matters what things look like, because we can't have these bog boring boxes any more or terrible-looking places like the Soandso Memorial Auditorium we were in that very minute in the Bobst Library, but that was probably designed by a committee he said, so what could you expect.

Then it was John Simon's turn, and John Simon said he didn't know anything about *art*, so he gave a lot of quotes from literature and the French Symbolists. The thing was, he had this French accent and that made Hilton Kramer and Michael Graves gnash their teeth because *they* didn't have a French accent. Then, just when his talk was supposed to be over, John Simon pulled out this poster of a Michael Graves building and held it up and the poster was flapping and curling up and he kept pointing at it, and he was so excited he was out of breath and almost spitting. Look What Won All Those Prizes, he said. It's So Terrible, It Looks Like Three Pregnant Buildings, Each One Having A Baby Building That Will Be Out And Running Around In The Nineties! People couldn't believe this was happening, so when we had the question period a man just asked What Is Deconstruction.

But I was starting to think a funny thing. Maybe the pretty lady in the beginning was like the lady on TV who comes out in the black leotard and really long panty hose just before they give away the car from

General Motors, I thought, only she was for intellectuals. I mean she was terrifically intellectual herself, even though I didn't understand what she was saying because she was right at the beginning when we were just trying to find a place to sit in the crowded room and so forth. But I thought you could get maybe Barbara Rose or Rosalind Krauss and have them right on the panel and nobody would get sick from having to look at them either. I mean,

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Faces the Future
panel . . ."**

Rosalind Krauss practically invented Post-Modernism. She probably even knows Foucault or somebody. Maybe they didn't have her because she goes to Hunter and this was NYU? So there's Mary Boone, who was already on the cover of *Life* or maybe *Time* just for being Post-Modern. But she isn't a Doctor or anything, just a business person, and you wouldn't want to sit a whole night listening to her saying how great Julian Schnabel is. Anyway, I was thinking these things when at that very minute it flashed on me how in the whole entire deal, with the French accent and the immortal lines and the end-to-end story of modern thought, nobody even mentioned a single woman, unless you count John Simon, who said Ayn-Rand-That-Miserable-Novelist because she had some weird hero copied from Frank Lloyd



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Wright, although I wondered at the time how he knew, because I, personally, could not read Ayn Rand. I mean nobody mentioned a single painter or writer or anyone who was a woman who *wasn't their girl friend*, and I started to think can this be? Are these guys doing Janson's *History of Art* all over, only *all* the arts and literature and poetry?

But a funny thing, you could tell they still *thought* about women, from little things they let drop. Like when Michael Graves said if there was a threshold in one of his buildings, If I Ever Got Married, God Help Me, I could Carry My Bride Over It. So you knew he didn't want to get married, and that's probably why his buildings have to have the children. That's OK with me, because they're pretty good-looking buildings, but I think maybe the roofs leak because he said something about having a 27-bucket building and everyone laughed. And he kept saying that if he had to make a building this way or that way or another way that he didn't want to, he'd rather be a lawyer, and he said that a whole lot so I figure he's probably getting sued, which may be a Post-Modernist development in the arts they forgot to mention. Another thing he said that showed he thinks about women was after the part about the Bride and the Threshold, when he said going into a building was like Penetrating a Membrane. You could tell he thought that was pretty daring (although I personally thought it was kind of corny).

And you could tell John Simon thinks about women, too, and if you want to know, not all men critics are going to think that much about women, *if you know what I mean*. But John Simon has a girl friend who's a hostess on a talk show, because he told this story about her right there on the panel and called her My Girl Friend, so you figure she's probably around 15 and maybe she'll grow up and get some good ideas about Post-Modernism and Art later on herself. But meanwhile, John is also interested in *older* women, too, and a lot of older men only go for the chicks, at least when they're successful and can get them. But John said one of the things he was talking about was like a Lovely Woman Of Indeterminate Age, so you knew he thought it was better for an older woman not to tell her age.

And another thing that happened. Near the end, someone (maybe it was John, too) said all the artists in the world are like one Heroic Priesthood, and I couldn't believe that, either. I mean, what am I hearing, I asked myself. So I was still worrying about whether or not I could be a member of a heroic priesthood when they had the question about Deconstruction. Then this person started to give her ques-

tion, which was exactly what I was thinking, why in a zillion artists and writers they didn't mention one woman, but Hilton Kramer cut right in real loud and quick and said That's Not A Question For Here You Have A Place For These Things, and the

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moderator, you could see why he was moderator, had another question real quick, too, so you wouldn't even remember she asked anything. He asked what John Simon meant when he said he thought Hilton Kramer had a Hidden Agenda, so they started trying to kill each other again right away, but smiling, so they would still look charming.

Then another lady in the audience said, What About The Sacred in Relation to Man And His World? And I couldn't believe my ears either. *Man And His World!* So a lady near me said, Welcome To Post-Modernism, and I said I Guess So, and the ones who hadn't left yet went and got some kind of pink punch. But I was still thinking about Hilton Kramer being so rude to that lady. I mean she wasn't a bag lady or anything, and then I had this really depressing thought. Maybe we shouldn't have any more women's panels or anything so they couldn't say you have a place for that and leave you out of everything else.

But looking on the *bright* side, Deconstruction is really getting out there. Deconstruction, I forgot to tell you, is when you say what *you* think is going on, not what everybody else thinks is going on. The lady asking what about the women artists was doing Deconstruction, but maybe they weren't ready for that, or for Post-Modernism either, if you really want to know, except Michael Graves. You could call it that Middle Age Faces The Future

panel, but for the audience it was The Being In The Same Room With Famous Men panel and that part was excellent. I mean I don't know a whole lot of famous men personally to find out about their girlfriends and like that.

Anyway, Michael Graves was the best, because he's an artist and he has his *art* out there for people to make cracks about it, and even though I've *only* seen it in pictures, I like it a lot. The *critics* are the ones always telling other people off, pick, pick, pick, and nobody ever points the finger at their *article* and says This Looks Like Three Baby Articles! I mean if they're so smart why don't they do it themselves?

One other thing I almost forgot. At the end, another lady in the audience stood up and told Michael Graves that she visited her daughter at Yale and had *tea* in the *Master's House* and felt really comfortable *there*. But that must have been the wrong kind of Post-Modernism because Michael Graves looked kind of pained and you could see he had to tell her in front of all those people that she shouldn't have felt comfortable in the Master's House because Aero Saarinen wasn't the right one, but she could have felt comfortable with his *father*. But she said she knows comfortable because her house is an 1840's house and the most perfect and comfortable of all. But if you want to know what I think, I think she felt comfortable because her daughter was at Yale, and I think who wouldn't feel comfortable if their daughter was at Yale. And I think who wouldn't want to get up after that evening and tell the whole room, *Our Daughters Are at Yale!*

— **Art Lover** (a native New Yorker and devotee of the arts.)

Ed Note: The Panel that so surprised and disappointed our Art Lover was: Post-Modernism in Art & Literature; Nov. 3, 1983, held at the Bobst Library, New York University, NYC.

Nancy Bowen, sculpture.

