



"River Bathers" by Albert Huie

Formal beauty

NEW ARTISTS - J.A. - HUIE, ALBERT
Albert Huie Show Reviewed by Andrew Hope

THE current exhibition of New Works by Albert Huie, mounted at Harmony Hall, Ocho Rios, is not a major one and consists of only 22 pictures: landscapes, seascapes, still-lives, portraits and figure compositions, many of them miniatures. But the range of subject matter is wide, offering ample scope for his talent, and in any case, every Huie show is an important event, for he is regarded by many as our leading painter. I am one of them.

It all depends to which school of criticism one belongs, and there are many of them, but should those "brilliant" panelists in the recent symposium on criticism at the NGJ succeed in putting their grotesque proposals into practice only those who have gone through the "constructive criticism process" at the CTC will be allowed to write and freedom of expression will be snuffed out as happened in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. For in practice "constructive criticism" will mean unreserved praise of the National Gallery, and the cultural establishment.

Being a formalist, to whom colour, size and composition matter most, I am not interested in a painting's content, for to me **form is the painting's content**, and looking at the present show I see that to Huie content also matters very little. Take, for instance, the portraits and you will note that their very titles signal Huie's concern with purely aesthetic qualities rather than investigation of the sitter's character, the latter being of course the prime aim of a conventional portrait painter.

Indeed we don't learn much about "Paulette", her private life

that is, when we examine the picture, but she makes a lovely splash of colours in her pink blouse set against green, as do the "Girl in Pink Blouse" and the "Girl in Blue" with equally felicitous colour combinations. Huie's aestheticism is also to be seen to advantage in his treatment of plants and flowers, specifically "The Garden Bouquet" with its white flowers floating on lavender ground, but he parades it somewhat in portraits of two resting models, one of the girls sporting an overpowering orange blouse, the other sharply outlined against glossy emerald drapery.

So interesting

Huie's treatment of nudes is so interesting that it deserves a special study, but at a glance one is bound to say that when seen in groups, bathing in the river, for instance, they seem much better integrated with their surroundings or, to put it quite simply, much more "natural" than when they are posed singly or in twos in a somewhat self-conscious way. And this observation also applies to his handling of clothed figures, for he is at his best when he sees them collectively, shorn of individuality, woven into a larger pattern of nature. To such pictures as "River Bathers" and "Scene from Port Henderson I" he brings with the aid of a light and airy technique his most subtle and telling colour harmonies, the delicious dusty pinks of bathers, set off by luminous greens of foliage, and a range of perfectly modulated greys in the beach scene which although small suggests a whole universe.

Only in one painting, "Downtown Uptown" (unfinished) does he attempt to comment on social ills and shows us the Constant Spring Road being invaded by higglers and their untidy stalls, spreading like a cancerous growth. But even here he is unable to depict ugliness, for everything touched by his brush is metamorphosed into beauty.