

Crosscurrents

by Jan Kelly

(Provincetown) The Provincetown Art Association has a show no one in Provincetown or visiting Provincetown, should miss. There is a simultaneous exchange show between Guild Hall Museum and The Provincetown Art Association and Museum. The Guild Hall is in East Hampton, New York. It is adjacent to New York as Provincetown is to Boston. Originally, when young forceful artists left urban centers for these outposts, they were naturally isolated. Today with reliable transportation as time-saving as the plane, the isolation is more mental than physical. It can be tapped as the artist needs it.

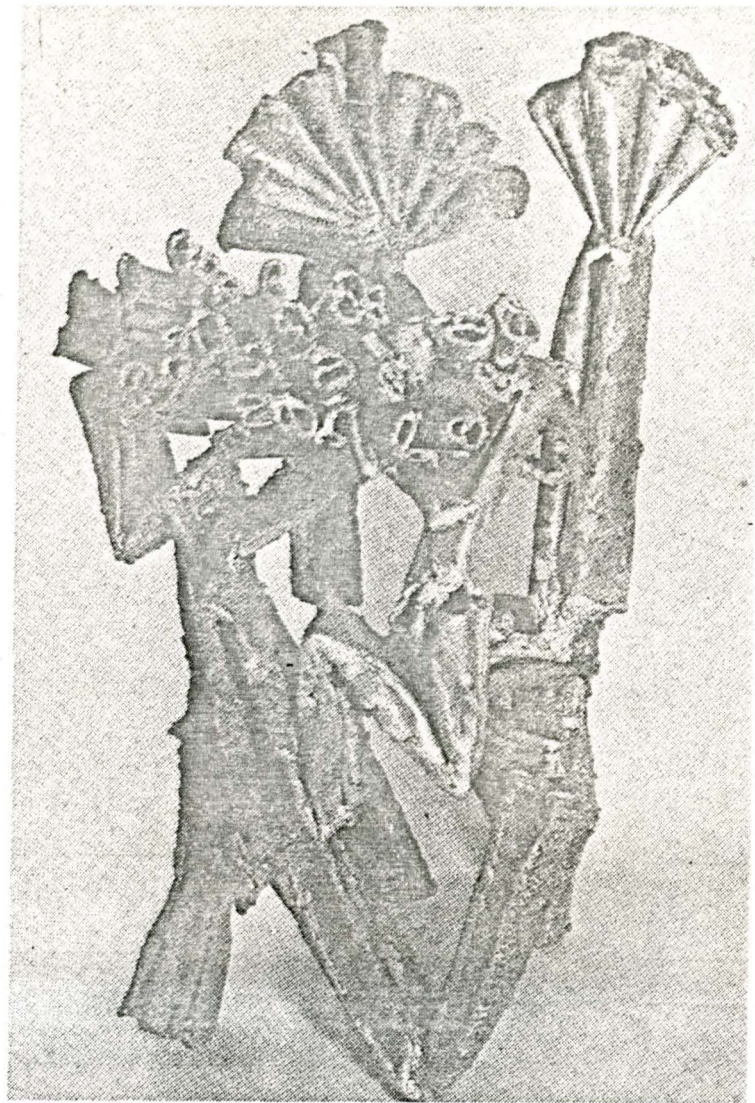
That these locations were chosen by so many gifted people who shaped the postwar art force of America, is no accident. The physical beauty, the ability to live an uncluttered and unpressured life, and the opportunity to commune with fellow artists striving toward a varied yet mutual goal, drew the numbered group. Names like Hassam, Lichtenstein, Rivers in East Hampton, Hawthorne, Avery, and Hoffman in Provincetown, with Motherwell, Gottlieb, Busa, and Spencer spanning both colonies.

Both Provincetown and East Hampton became self-styled cultural centers. Provincetown the more rustic, the more Bohemian, had and does have a dense population, a bay, dunes, and a sea of innumerable shipwrecks. Our houses are built one almost touching the other, we have an active fishing fleet and a colorful Portuguese culture. East Hampton has expanse, the areas are larger, more estate-like, less neighborhood-like and the sea seems distant. But the work went on at both fronts. And the work is wonderful to see. The romantic and peaceable period up to the 40s is in contrast to the war and post-war work. A large McGovern piece will tell you of the group's political position, each artist adding his personal comment. Chronology will let you know that the work is still going on. Young artists are being drawn by will and by invitation. Provincetown's scholarship program is the Fine Arts Work Center. East Hampton's is the Albee Foundation at Montauk. The work continues. Enjoying and learning from the past is part of it. I urge you to take part in this exhibition as an active guest.

Ibram Lassaw came from East Hampton especially for the opening of the exhibition. I was fortunate enough to meet Ibram and Ernestine Lassaw. Suzanne Sinaiko was their hostess for their first visit in 33 years, a visit of nostalgia. Ernestine and Ibram met in Provincetown 40 years ago at Cutler's Drugstore. The memory is as fresh as their mutual affection and respect. Suzanne gave a birthday dinner for Buddy Meyer so we all had a good opportunity to spend several hours celebrating Buddy and unravelling the career of Ibram Lassaw and the existence of so many and various beautiful and thought-provoking sculptures. The fact that sculpting is a most natural talent of Ibram Lassaw is supported by the fact that he was attracted by this medium at the unschooled and unskilled age of 12. At this age Ibram became a student of Dorothea Denslow at the Brooklyn Children's Museum. From there he joined the Clay Club and moved onto the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design in New York for ages 15 & 16. Ibram also attended the City College of New York and the Sculpture Center, 69th at Lexington and Third Aves.

Lassaw worked on the Federal Arts Project of the Public Works Administration along with DeKooning, Pollock, Rothko, and David Smith. He refers to this period as the enlightened period because of Roosevelt's sensitivity to the arts as well as his foresight for America's cultural recognition and security. This period established American art globally and faded the European image of American artists as "country cousins." More than Folk art, Primitivism, and tight academic art was being worked on in the United States. Artists received enough practical and emotional support to pursue their talents and ideals, rather than taking any job to survive. Murals and statuary make up a great part of the resulting art, but the important aspect is that artists remained at their posts of experiment and growth and many successful individuals emerged from the era. Besides his own successful emergence as a major American sculptor, Ibram Lassaw helped found the American Abstract Artists in 1936, and was president from 1946-1949.

For more than fifty years, Ibram has sculpted, taught,



Red Close, 1964, copper and phosphor bronze

counselled, and exhibited with the steadiness of Polaris. He has taught at American University, Washington DC, Duke, Colorado College, University of California at Berkley, Southampton College, at Brandeis and Mount Holyoke. Many universities, temples, places of business and Rockefeller Center display his architectural commissions. The list includes the Whitney, Museum of Modern Art in New York and Rio, the Fogg and The National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington DC. Ibram Lassaw is a strong and handsome physical specimen and shows no sign of giving in to grey hairs.

The more you watch him, the more he resembles his handsome and thought-reaching sculptures. He is even and gives you the impression that he moves non-stop in his artistic direction. When you have left his company, his being persists and makes you want to see and enjoy more of his art. I have enjoyed two of his pieces in miniature in the handsome necklaces that Suzanne Sinaiko often wears. Ernestine Lassaw told me at any gathering in East Hampton, these pieces are as numerous and as evident as the stars. Everybody wants to wear one, give one, and look at all of them.

His sculpture moves out into space, making the space as important as the form occupying it and penetrating it. The mind goes on at a steady pace; the work follows and each piece is like a gift to the human race. The artist and his work are involved in the ongoing process of functioning as a part of the universe.

The materials used are plastic, plaster, lucite, steel, copper, bronze, brass, and alloys. Each receives full credit in its substance and in groups. Vivid, yet calming, is how I see these works. You can almost see the thought process and the enjoyment of execution in each. A lover of music, the sculpture displays the harmony of several parts becoming one. There are some that Lassaw can strike to make beautiful sounds. It all blends with a living universe. It has life, rather than being static.

Ibram Lassaw has gone back to East Hampton after opening the show at the Art Association, but you can enjoy a part of this man when you visit and see his sculpture "Caryatids." This work is of bronze and various metals. The show will be here through July 24. The Art Association is at 460 Commercial Street and is open 12 to 4 and 7 to 10, daily.