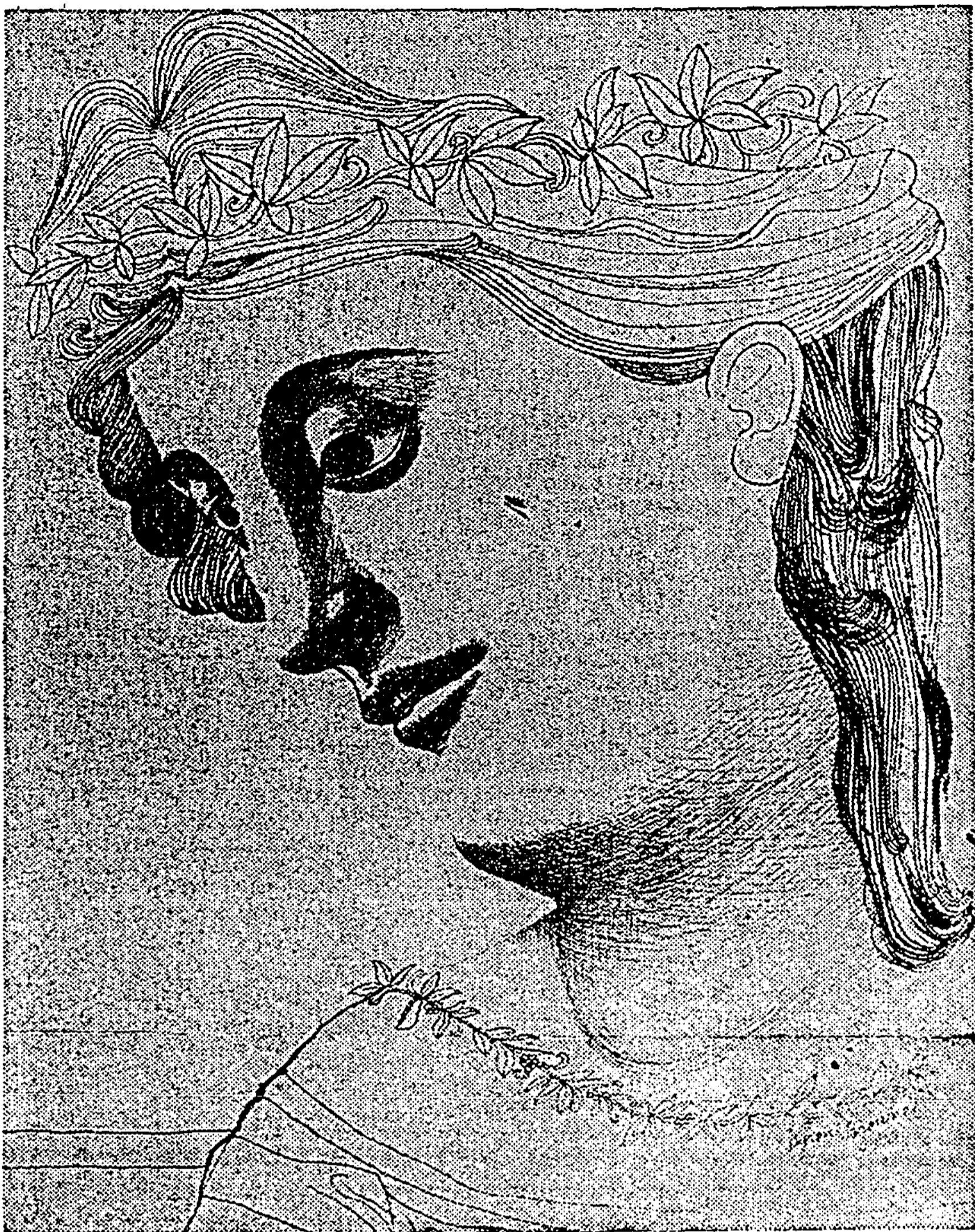


Byron Browne's Faces of Women



"Bacchante," India ink on paper, by the late Byron Browne
He derived inspiration from the old masters, filtered through Picasso

By GRACE GLUECK

THERE ARE ARTISTS like Picasso, the form-givers, rising above the inevitable early dialogue with art history and the work of others to create an inimitable vocabulary of their own. And then there are admirers of those artists, ingenious embroiderers of their work, who live happily with their influence and whose own oeuvre becomes the more interesting the closer its alliance with that of the chosen master.

The late Byron Browne (1907-1961) was the latter kind of artist, a prolific Picasso follower whose Cubist-minded still lifes give a peculiarly American flavor to the Picasso idiom. A founder of the American Abstract Artists, Browne had innumerable one-man shows and in his youth did a number of murals under the auspices of the Works Projects Administration. But while his paintings were ubiquitous, very little has been seen of his draftsmanship, and so the current show of his drawings, at the Washburn Gallery, 820 Madison Avenue (through January) comes as a delightful surprise.

Shown for the first time, the drawings are classicized women's heads, done between 1934 and 1952. They have a double whammy—deriving inspiration from such masters as Botticelli, Michelangelo, Titian and particularly Ingres, they are filtered through Picasso's neo-classical forms of the 1920's, and seem to this viewer the most interesting work that Browne produced.

For his subjects, Browne took goddesses, virgins, madonnas, bacchantes, equipped them with elaborate coiffures, and gave them the wonderfully sappy stares of neo-Roman tradition. Some of the works quote directly from art historical subjects: In "Seated Woman," a drawing of 1952, for example, the subject poses on a Recamier-like chaise, a drooping rose in one hand, the other touching her ear, and certainly has something to do with Ingres's portrait of Madame Moitessier.

Aside from their campy accoutrements, the real effect of these drawings lies in the ingeniously exaggerated modeling of facial contours, achieved with cross-hatching, the most subtle of shading, and a wonderful certainty of line. In feeling, they are at once tender and funny, and one wishes that the artist had left more work in this genre.

Also in the galleries this week:

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René Magritte: 16 photographs (Sonabend Gallery, 420 West Broadway): The Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte (1898-1967) left no substantial body of photographs at his death, but had made a small group of what were essentially snapshots, some relating to his painterly compositions. Now 16 of them, ranging in date from 1923 to 1955, taken from the collection of his widow, Mme. Georgette Magritte, have been published in a portfolio, "La Fidélité des Images," with titles by Louis Scutenaire, a friend of the artist.

Not surprisingly, these tiny photographs (they are wisely kept negative size) are in much the same key as the paintings, full of visual puns and ambiguities. One, "The Pharaohs, or the

Eighth Dynasty," has fun with the 1920's vogue for Egyptian tomb-trekking; in it, Magritte, his wife, a friend and a child form a declamatory tableau next to a Pyramidal pile of bricks; in another, "L'Amour," the artist "paints" his wife, using her as both the subject and the object of the brush. A third, "God, the Eighth Day," is a posed study for the famous Magritte subject of a man with a birdcage for a torso.

Except for the ones that relate to the paintings, these snaps are very personal, and they give interesting clues to the working of the artist's mind. Through Feb. 12.

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Stephen Greene: Works on Paper (Marilyn Pearl Gallery, 29 West 57th Street): Over a career of 30 years, Mr. Greene has evolved from figurative work, concerned with death and angst, to abstraction whose use of color might even be described as hedonistic. But occasionally, in this beautiful show of his recent drawings, the work is nostalgically invaded by a bone, a skull or other of the macbre elements from an earlier period. It's as if the artist still felt the need to stay in touch with despair.

But on the whole, the key is sensuous enjoyment, and one of the particular pleasures here, in a group of drawings from 1974, is the way in which all manner of geometric and biomorphic color forms go winging off from each other across fields of carefully adjusted white space. Quite a different effect is achieved in a group of later drawings, from 1975, in which more solid masses of subtly-modulated color, punctuated by a repertoire of squiggles, dots, lines and streaks, fill out the paper nearly to its edges. Throughout, the artist's control rarely misses. Until Jan. 29.

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Keith Long: (James Yu Gallery) 393 West Broadway. In this, his first New York solo show, Mr. Long has a serious way with wood (there seems to be a lot of it this year around the galleries—maybe the interest in ecology has suspended the plastic tide). He scratches, distresses, and worries its surface with tools to create textural incident, then—with considerable craftsmanship—binds individual slats into wall pieces. The effect is totemic, as if they were the weathered artifacts of a preliterate tribe. An arresting debut. Through Jan. 26.

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Buky Schwartz: (O.K. Harris) 383 West Broadway. Mr. Schwartz, an Israeli-born sculptor, does it again with mirrors (as he did in a more complex show last year at this gallery). A heavy beam is vertically suspended from the ceiling, its top cut partially away and a mirror placed to reflect the cut surfaces. The effect is as if the beam were cut all the way through, then levitated. The same look is achieved with another beam that leans from the wall to the floor. The end against the wall is cut on the diagonal, and a mirror placed to reflect the cut surface. Voilà! seemingly no support. It was an acceptable device last year; now maybe it's wearing a bit thin. Through Jan. 29.