

Chess in Haifa

Ephraim Harris

"CHESS IN ART" is a show counterpointing the Haifa games, comprising 40 Israeli and international artists but Korab alone realises the cerebral nature of the subject. The sculptors, who have designed sets, (Gentils, Popovits) or who have confined themselves to the king and queen (Karoly and Bezalel) despite their fancifulness, have maintained the slender verticality of regular pieces; at one extreme, Ilan adds to their weight and, at the other, Man Ray reduces them to stubby evocations of Cezanne's basic forms. Milshtein, in a wall relief, gives erotic connotations to the pieces in his set. As for the rigours of the game, we find them in Barnett's coloured print.

The earliest picture on show is a French 15th century depiction of what may have been an actual game (Brauer's oil tries a similar period reconstruction). There are humorous 18th to 20th century cartoons, including the only comparison of politics to chess viz. a French cartoon referring to a long forgotten Anglo-French crisis of 1843. In fact, save Duchamp, little rapport exists between the artists and chess. Hardly anybody has recognised the abstract potentials latent in a position, unless it be Engel's two kings, sole survivors on the board, facing each other with an air of finality. Nor do we see any recall of its history and mythology, its Far Eastern origins, games of courtly love and games with Death and Fate. The artists have created their own private mythologies. Feingersh portrays a human lover trying to grasp the queen trapped in the castle; Lartigne, on a palette of red, black and light brown, has the king and queen at a game and surrounded by apposite symbols from playing cards; Blake's witty illustration of the king's weakness is reinforced by a Lewis Carroll quotation; Erte uses chess men for the design of theatrical costumes. The most popular motifs are the chess board, the knight (always a horse, naturally) and the castle — one could not detect a bishop clearly (at times a

piece also a problem for the sculptor's sets). Zemer's board waves like a banner over the castle; Hockney places an unmanned board beside his sitter, simply as an attribute; Alt glorifies "King Chess" in bright collages; Messinger combines the board and the knight. Other artists have merely used chess elements for their customary manner. Axelrod a single piece in a normal still life; Bak just inserts pieces in his typical surrealism; Davie, as joyous as Alt, must have taken chess into nursery fittings; while Jean David's oils have an unhabitual seriousness. All the participants mentioned have been selected for saliency of the artistic mind towards an entirely rational game but this does not reflect in any way on names omitted: Feilding, Agam, Briss, Arman, Castel, Ardon, Argov, Villon, Kaiser, Giladi, Vasarely, Papart, Rigal, Ponce, Karavan, Friedeberg and Barel. (Goldman's Gallery).

MIXED BAG

"ISRAELI OILS" are a collection, which as in such instances often brings out less expected attitudes in an artist's work. For example, Bezem's two "problem" pictures seem to have adopted, for the recumbent figures, Francis Bacon's habit of adding a second colour to confuse identification. Another apparent influence is Rouault (on Bonne, apart from the tondo). It is hard to choose between Kuhn's spatial and unsettling landscape and his compact still life; and the former leads psychologically to the surrealism in Feingersh's man with a candle, seated on a huge hand. Strangeness also applies somewhat to Ofek's stiffly fixed trio drying themselves after a dip. Straight realism includes Lubin's time-honoured Oriental gentleman with nargileh; Arieli (a sigh at still another version of the artist and model); Eisenscher's tenement, linear but colour more pronounced; Goldberg's usual women; another two women now high toned from Schloss; and a neat little impressionist landscape from Schor — at least let us hope it was he because along with other participants, he suffered from difficulties in offering a legible signature, (Danya Art Gallery).

STEFFA REIS

STEFFA REIS' "Israeli Landscapes — Synthesis," are chiefly very satisfactorily executed acrylics on canvas. Their style has two self-contained realist approaches which might easily turn abstract, but not in her case. The first bisects the frame by a thin strip of rural houses on the horizon, in 26 a blue sky and green earth, in 30 black earth. The impression is one of peaceful distance. The second (31 and 32) suggests an aerial view of water side communities parcellated into small areas. Both approaches combine — not necessarily the "synthesis" of her obscure title — to enrich the first, in itself become repetitive, by enlarging the horizon buildings and protruding them into the earth. Reis's pure abstractions, particularly the dark replete frames, are ordinary; those on white backgrounds are at least brighter. The proportions of now three approaches are exactly suited to her smallish canvases. (Beit Chagall, Haifa). Till Nov. 10. □