

that they have ever mounted. The sculpture is dullish; and the best piece, though even here the photograph (Fig.66) is taken from the only really satisfying angle, is Wilton's tinted plaster bust of James Wolfe. The gallery has been fortunate in being able to benefit from remissions of death duties, and other kinds of tax concession. This has enabled it to acquire, from the Northwick Park Collection, the exquisite early self-portrait by Gainsborough; Romney's peachy little study of Lady Hamilton, as likely a candidate as any for the origin of the phrase 'as pretty as a picture'; and Reynolds's *Warren Hastings of 1766-8*.

This portrait turns out to be something of a disappointment. The composition, the placing of the figure in relation to the table and the curtain and, indeed, to the rectangle of the canvas itself, all that is fine enough, but it still does not quite make up for Reynolds's deficiencies as a craftsman. The drawing is in places poor; in Hastings's left arm, the treatment of the relationship between the wrist, the cuff and the sleeve of the coat is surprisingly weak. More serious still is a disparity in the vision, which may have had a lot to do with the participation of assistants. The treatment of the blue velvet collar, for example, implies a degree of verisimilitude that is not to be found in the painting of the skin, in either face or hands, or in the hair.

Altogether more successful, both as a coherent piece of painting, and as the image of a person of consequence, is the later (1785) Reynolds of *Boswell* (Fig.68). This cost £25,000 and supersedes the bituminous copy (or studio version) which the Gallery already owned.

Highlights from the earlier periods include two Honthorsts, one of Charles I reading, familiar from the Orange and the Rose exhibition, the other a modestly regal whole-length of Charles's sister, Elizabeth of Bohemia; what is believed to be the only surviving contemporary portrait of Lady Jane Grey, a full-length of c.1550; and a version (Fig.67) of Holbein's 1527 portrait of *Sir Thomas More* now in the Frick. This cost £15,000; and even though the Gallery itself contributed only a portion of the sum, it seems a great deal to have paid for what no one has claimed is any more than an early copy, and one that is, moreover, in far from pristine condition.

The modern material includes several good things; the self-portrait of *Gwen John*, for instance, as fine and as delicate an example of her powers as one is likely to find anywhere; a 1927 Sickert of *Churchill*; two rather mannered drawings of *Edith Sitwell*, by Wyndham Lewis; and Patrick Heron's analytical cubist image of *T. S. Eliot* (1949), a portrait that does little to illuminate the character of the poet; though it tells one a good deal about the style of Mr Heron. KEITH ROBERTS

El Lissitzky

The exhibition now on view at Basle Kunsthalle is a moving event for those

who knew Lissitzky, and a revelation for those who did not. Here is the *œuvre* of a great artist, whose contribution to twentieth-century art deserves to be remembered, not merely as the participation of one among many, but one, rather, who may be hailed as an eminent protagonist of formative thinking in our day.

El (Eleazar Markovich) Lissitzky (1890-1941) was a near-contemporary of Casimir Malevich, whose famous painting *Black Square on White Ground* (1913) marked the transition from early Suprematism, 'the supremacy of pure emotion in art', to its later phase summed up by him as 'the expression of pure non-objectivity'. This, in turn, generated the beginnings of Russian Constructivism of which Lissitzky may be considered the chief exponent.

Trained as an architect under Joseph Olbrich at Darmstadt Technical High School between 1909 and 1914, his private drawings were, then, mainly concerned with historical buildings he came across during his study trips. Back in Russia at the outbreak of war, he illustrated a number of books, notably on Jewish subjects, in a colourful style influenced by folklore and Chagall, whom he greatly admired. In 1919, Chagall, then Head of the Academy of Art in Vitebsk, his native town, appointed Lissitzky to a professorship in architecture and graphic design. When Malevich, too, was invited to join the Academy, close collaboration ensued between him and Lissitzky. It was then that Lissitzky's *PROUN* idea began to emerge. (The name *PROUN* is derived from the initials of the Russian wording for 'Newly established art form')

Lissitzky's twin propensity as painter and architect was ideally matched and so, within a comparatively short period, he produced some of his finest *PROUN* pictures which soon established his reputation as an original artist.

A *PROUN*, to Lissitzky, was not merely a picture, nor solely architectural design. It was an interplay of pictorial as well as structural qualities. Elements which to Malevich had been imbued with a touch of transcendental meaning were, in the hands of Lissitzky, recast into 'objects' of material substance, a challenge, at the same time, to a corresponding notion of space. It has been claimed that this development was an outcome of Lissitzky's acquaintance with Vladimir Tatlin, widely known in the early twenties for his design of a spiral-shaped monument to the Third International. This was only partly correct. For when, in 1922 and after, Lissitzky again visited Western Europe, he found some of his fellow artists in Germany, Switzerland, and Holland pursuing similar trends, the idea having been 'in the air'.

This led to a string of animated discussions on the respective merits of different art movements and groupings, such as Malevich's Suprematism, the various brands of Constructivism, the principles of De Stijl, the teachings of the Bauhaus -

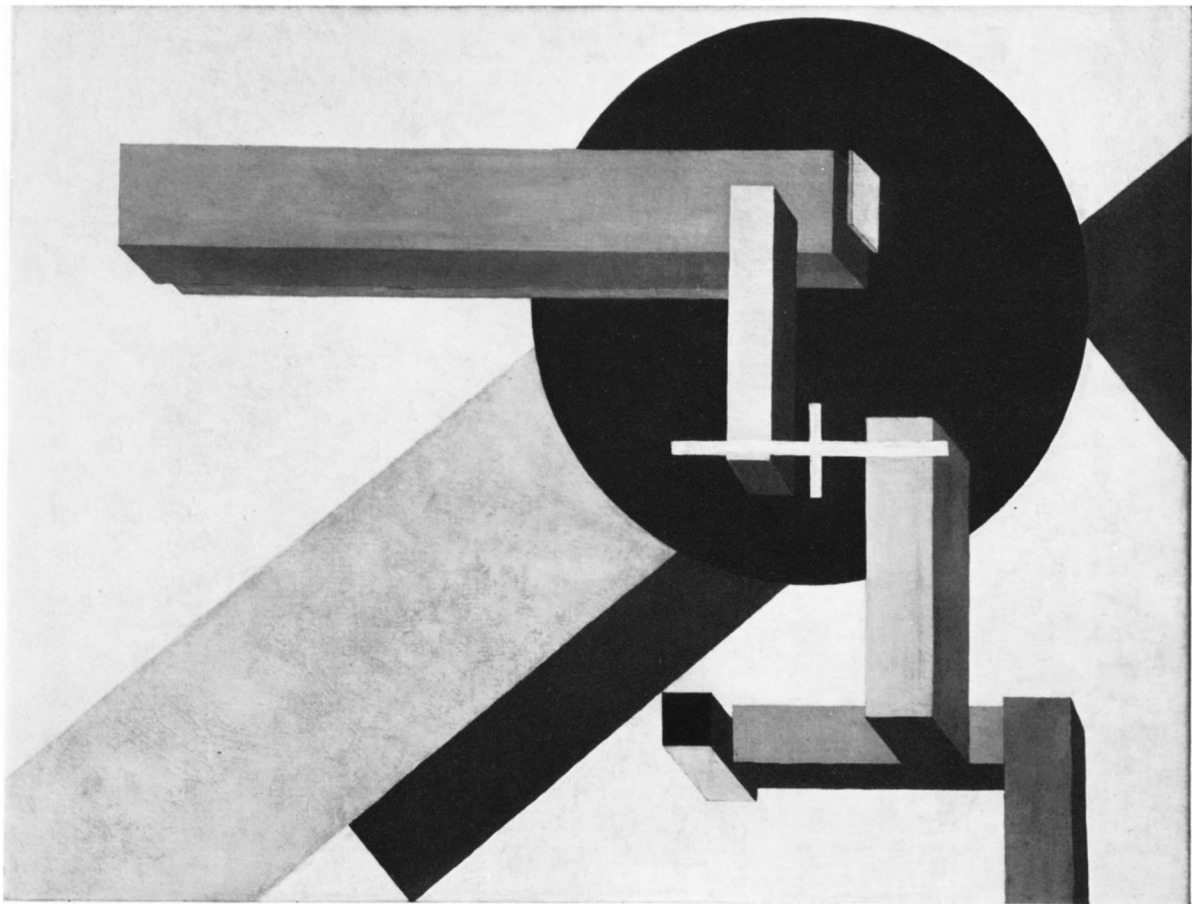
give and take being general as well as generous. Lissitzky formed close friendships with Hans Arp, Theo van Doesburg, C. van Eesteren, Mies van der Rohe, Moholy-Nagy, Kurt Schwitters, Mart Stam and others. He was invited to contribute to various magazines including *Das Kunstblatt*, *Merz*, and *De Stijl*, who also reprinted his story of *The Two Squares*, previously published at Vitebsk. With Arp he edited *Die Kunstisten*, and his treatise 'Typographische Tatsachen' appeared in *Gutenberg Festschrift*, 1925.

While at Hanover he produced, in 1923, a series of lithographs for the Kestner Gesellschaft, and in 1927 designed, for the Landesmuseum, a special gallery (deliberately destroyed by the National Socialists in 1936) 'allowing abstract art to do justice to its dynamic properties'. This as well as an earlier design of his at the International Art Exhibition in Dresden the year before, had been anticipated by Lissitzky's *PROUN* Cabinet in the Grosse Berliner Kunstaustellung of 1923. This Cabinet, recently rebuilt at Eindhoven and now to be seen at Basle, was a striking example of painting, sculpture and architecture integrated into a unit of which the visitor feels himself to be part.

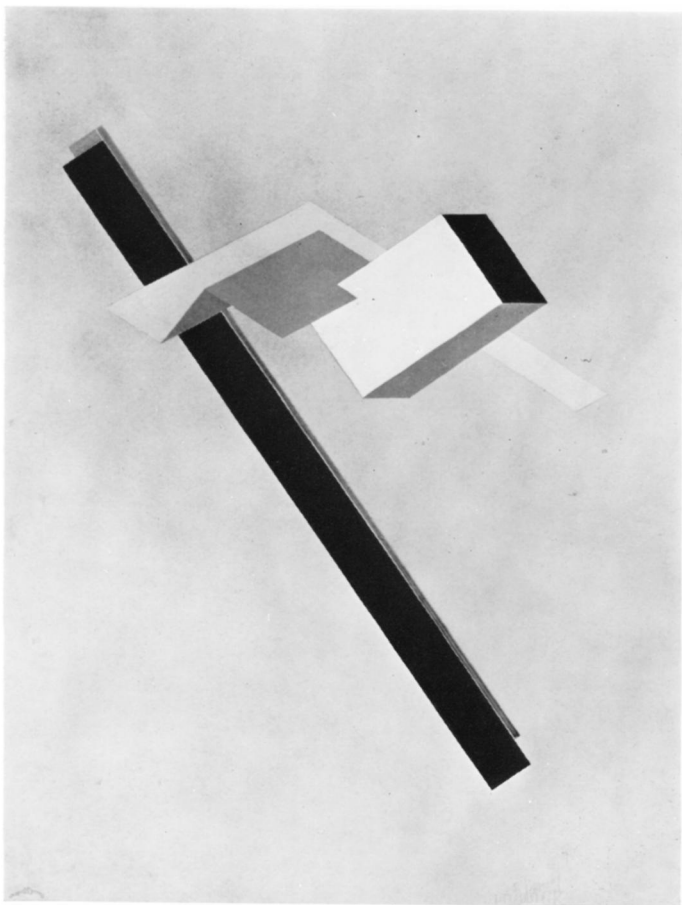
Lissitzky's exceptional ability for structural design, his bold ideas for utilitarian architecture, as evident from his drawings of a projected office block in Moscow - where he returned for good in 1931 - his accomplishments as a typographer, his book covers and his posters - including the magnificent job he did for Zurich Kunstgewerbemuseum in 1929 - his photographs, photograms and montages, the delightful lithographs and preliminary sketches he did at Hanover for the folder *Victory over the Sun*, and, last but not least, his early illustrations, all displayed at the Kunsthalle, are indispensable for a comprehensive impression of his achievement and demonstrate the artist's versatile genius. But it is the *PROUN*s that impress themselves most strongly on the mind (Figs.69, 70). Lissitzky willed them to be objects, and we are brought face to face with them as 'objects' of an, admittedly, unusual nature. They seem to rise, and to soar, to hover and to float, and we, ourselves, accept all this as being perfectly compatible with what appears to be their bodily presence. Small wonder therefore if even experts do not always agree on the correct viewing position, as has been the case with *PROUN ID*, reproduced here as published in the official catalogue.

The parts making up the identity of a *PROUN* are mostly adaptations of geometrical forms and their stereometric equivalents. Bright colours are used very sparingly. Some brick red, some slate blue, a stroke of yellow, are set against a wide range of greys and buffs, creams and off-whites, an occasional brown, and, practically always, some black.

The effort involved in getting together this unique exhibition on a comprehensive scale for the first time, is in itself an extra-



69. *Proun ID*, by El Lissitzky. 1919. Canvas, mounted on plywood, 71.5 by 96 cm. (Kunstmuseum, Basle; exh. Kunsthalle, Basle.)



70. *Proun GK*, by El Lissitzky. c.1923. Gouache, 66 by 50.2 cm. (Museum of Modern Art, New York; exh. Kunsthalle, Basle.)



71. *Catalyst*, by Bryan Kneale. 1964. Steel; height, 6 ft; width, 3 ft 11 in. (Collection British-American Tobacco Co. Ltd, London; exh. Whitechapel Art Gallery.)

ordinary achievement; for some of the components were, one gathers, not easy to come by. Museums, art galleries and libraries in Holland, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, Israel and elsewhere, and private collectors all over the world, including England, Norway and France, have liberally collaborated. An appreciable number of sources have remained unnamed. Mr J. Leering, Director of the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum at Eindhoven, is to be congratulated on his initiative, which has brought about the excellent result we have an opportunity to study at Basle until 13th March. The exhibition will be shown at Kestner Gesellschaft, Hanover, in April 1966.

LUCIA MOHOLY

Munch at the Guggenheim Museum, New York

The Munch exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York is the first on such a scale in the United States since the retrospective of 1950 which was seen in Boston and at the Museum of Modern Art. In many respects the two are comparable; in others quite different. Each contained the same number of paintings (sixty-four in 1950, sixty-seven in 1965) of which three-fourths were earlier than 1909, the year Munch entered a psychiatric clinic in Copenhagen and before his return to Norway where he remained until his death in 1944. Consequently the later work has again been qualitatively slighted in favour of earlier and more familiar pictures, and once again its reassessment has been made more difficult by so slim and arbitrary a selection. There is also a sameness about the two exhibitions. Grateful as one must be for the opportunity to see so many of the artist's best works from public and private collections in Scandinavia, for those with long memories it seems a pity that no less than thirty-one, or almost half, of the paintings from 1950 have turned up again. Nor is the current selection qualitatively superior to the earlier. There are certain interesting large and linear compositions, like *Fertility* of about 1898 (from the Sigval Bergesen Collection, Oslo) which seem to lead stylistically to the Oslo murals of 1911-14, but among the familiar works one misses *Puberty*, *Ashes*, and *The Day After*, all of 1894, as well as *In Hell* and *Self-portrait with Cigarette*, both of 1895, which present the contradictory aspects of Munch's art and of his artistic philosophy, his self-assured command of visual facts and his anxious, compulsive revelation of psychic torment (see Figs. 72-4).

The 1950 exhibition also contained three times as many prints and water-colours as the present one, and their relevance to the paintings was discussed and generously illustrated in the catalogue by Professor Frederick B. Deknatel, of Harvard, whose introduction remains, after fifteen years, one of the clearest analyses of Munch's art and life. In the Guggenheim catalogue there are sixteen

adequate colour plates and all the paintings are illustrated but none of the other material. There is a useful chronology, but the brief introductions by the ranking Munch scholars in Norway, Sigurd Willoch, Director of the Nasjonalgalleriet and Johan H. Langaard, Director of the Munch-Museet, are disappointingly perfunctory.

So much for comparative and, on the whole, negative considerations. The exhibition itself is handsome; it contains many of the most important pictures, and, given the peculiarities of the museum's architecture, it has been intelligently and sensitively installed. Now that five years have passed since this monument to Frank Lloyd Wright's dislike of any other art than his own was opened, and the shock of descending the circular ramp has lessened, the many architectural virtues of this idiosyncratic structure can be appreciated. But the tedium and discomfort of looking at works of art while walking downhill, and of always turning to the left to confront them hanging with monotonous regularity by twos and threes in separate bays have, for this viewer, become even more distracting. Because all the paintings must be seen from more or less the same distance and the partitions between the bays prevent comparisons and recalls (unless one walks uphill), the cumulative experience of studying sixty pictures can be both monotonous and fatiguing. The only interruption occurs in the rectangular hall opening from the ramp near the ground level, where Thomas M. Messer, the director of the museum and of the exhibition, has hung together five life-size male portraits (necessarily because the ceiling height of the ramp is too low to accommodate them). There, where the men in the paintings are standing so solidly on their legs, one can stand firmly on one's own. Mr Messer has, however, used the partitions to show preliminary drawings and prints, as well as later graphic versions of certain subjects so that even if the selection of prints and drawings was meagre, they were admirably chosen to demonstrate Munch's preoccupation with certain themes and his tendency to move from a reasonably literal representation to more intensive colouristic and linear syntheses, most notably in the several versions of *The Kiss* or *Embrace* of 1892 and the *Madonna* of 1893-4.

The exhibition and its presentation were so excellent that the general indifference of the public and of the younger generation of students is the more puzzling. There has been relatively little written about it and less spoken, at least among this reviewer's acquaintance and among his students who are usually responsive to what is happening only seventy miles to the west of New Haven. It cannot be that Munch is overly familiar to us, otherwise than through reproductions, for only three of the paintings were lent by museums in the United States, and there are very few in private collections. Can it

be that he is better known as a graphic artist (there are good examples in many museums and an exceptional collection in the Boston Museum) so that the paintings, many of them on the same themes, look like tentative and often turgid preliminary exercises? Or is it that his best works are so saturated with *fin-de-siècle* symbolism and with a linearism frequently perilously close to decorative manipulation that now, convalescing from our recent enthusiasm for *art nouveau*, Munch looks to us tired and old-fashioned? Is his symbolic content no longer central to our own anxieties, his attitude towards women too sterile, even too melodramatic, as in the startlingly inept and ugly *Beast (Female Nude)* of 1902 from Hanover which looks like a prudish illustration for Wedekind? Or finally, may not Munch be greater than we can perceive at the moment because with him we cannot play the game of updating the artist, of finding in him seeds and sources of what came after, whether he willed it or not, that kind of art-historical hindsight which a few years ago almost persuaded us that Gustave Moreau was all the time trying to be an abstract expressionist instead of an embarrassingly literal teller of very tall tales? I found it possible to play this game only once, with the beautifully luminous *Starry Night* of about 1893, from the J. H. Andressen Collection in Oslo, an almost square canvas filled with a few simplified shapes of trees and shore, in dark restless greens against the softly iridescent sky dotted with bright stars (one of which inexplicably was shining in the tree!) The pattern and the restrained colours were much like Baziotes's and the mood like Rothko's. They should have been sympathetic to contemporary taste but no one else was looking at the painting on the occasions when I was.

There was another picture whose dates, 1905 to 1927, embrace the most successful period of Central European Expressionism. This was the *Death of Marat*, from the Munch-Museet, a large canvas 6 ft wide whose gruesome dull blood-reds and greens and oddly off-hand juxtaposition of the recumbent male figure on the bed with the female figure standing beside it, both more naked than nude, seemed even more impressive than before, more like some unpleasant 'happening' than another exercise in the lost art of figure painting. It was clear, the longer one looked at it, that the title was merely a pretext. It was not the subject of the picture, no more than the subject - a wierdly static incident in so violent an event - was its content. Whatever that content is, it must have something to do with inexpressible thoughts of blood and lust, more horrible perhaps when the action, as in this painting, may have been committed only in the mind.

The received opinion that Munch's work declined in expressive and stylistic intensity after 1909 and his return to Norway from the excitements of Central Europe was not contradicted by this exhibition. If anything the later works