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In the constantly changing world of art it is the critic alone that seems to be a fixture. This, at any rate, is how the art critics themselves see it! The critique of criticism, itself all but an area of aesthetics in its own right, has been mainly concerned with the problems of methodology or with the structural definitions of criticism's social function as an element in the "Artist - Society" feedback system. Never was it doubted that the only form of the critic's activity was to utter pronouncements and assessments, either for publication or as a contribution to a debate. The critic's influence on creative processes in art was, in this case, though important but not decisive.

However, certain events in the artistic life of recent years, the eighties in particular, caused considerable underground, rumblings beneath our Olympus of art criticism. It became quite clear to all that those who shaped, organized and, at times, simply made up such processes began to play a rather greater role in the destinies of contemporary art, than those who merely analysed them.

Thus, the influence of a critic having a say in the composition of major exhibitions of modern art is immeasurably greater than the influence of a critic writing about them after the fact. A critic with access to such mass media as television has much more tangible influence than the

"traditional" writer or publicist. Whereas formerly people spoke somewhat shyly and self-consciously about at least some influence exerted by criticism on the art market, today the activities of some critics stand in direct proportion to the commercial value of the works of art concerned.

So, we see how eventually taking shape in the world of art is the figure of the art critic as a vigorous organizer, past-master at publicity, sponsor, and even businessman.

It is not accidental that many recent trends in art defined by such prefixes as "trans-", "neo-", "pre-" and "post-" have been fathered not so much by the artists, as by the critics.

It has likewise become habitual in art reviews of artistic tendencies to invoke the fatal tandem: a certain art critic plus the owner of a major gallery (Bonito Oliva and Mazzoli, or Castelli of New York; Holly Solomon and Safrazzi, and so on).

The simplest thing, of course, would be to regard this development as a para-cultural fact, marginal to genuine art. But underlying it, rather, are deeper and more fundamental regularities in the evolution of modern art criticism. The very special, mass character of the dissemination of art required, gave rise to new forms of equally mass-oriented art criticism. What I mean here is not its speculative and commercialized aspects, but that active principle, so essential in supporting new forms of the social existence of art.

The involvement of specialists in putting together not merely a single art exhibition, but a series of exhibitions, in creating documentary films devoted to art, in arranging

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and hosting TV programmes, holding special manifestations associated with pictorial arts - all these are new and important forms of activity by the contemporary critic, quite essential for the development of art. They not only call for a special brand of social activity, but also for special training, professionalism, and considerable creative flexibility. They are still in need of special analysis and more precise evaluation. One minute of TV time means an audience counted in millions. And here the critic's word assumes tremendous importance. In this situation, in view of its creative potential, the term "popularization" is no longer adequate.

The Soviet section of AICA is taking just the first steps in assimilating and promoting this kind of research work. It is our intention to organize, on the strength of socialological studies, an experimental exhibition whose character and functioning are fully governed by relevant theoretical explorations by art specialists.

Soviet art critics are making an ever bigger and more active contribution to the pictorial art festivals held every year all over the country. Art critics are guiding a monthly TV programme on pictorial art. These and many more events of a similar kind, along with the traditional forms of art criticism, open up, we believe, a new and broader area for critical endeavour.

All the above, of course, is merely an outline of what is new in our professional work. One thing, though, is without doubt: in the ever changing world of art, the figure of the art critic is no longer the same.