

TILT, which will be on exhibit at the Contemporary Art Center until Dec. 31, proved to be an unusual happening. It is billed as "a light environment by Gilbert, Bushnell, Tovish and Wisnosky."

TILT is a first of sorts. As such it is liable to irritate those onlookers whose opinions are pre-cast. It may even puzzle men of good will. As to the passers-by that crisscross the gallery in the busy News Building, how could they spare the time to pause and to ponder?

All this is reason enough for the critic to have a try at clarifying the status of the show. To set it up was in itself no mean enterprise, as many who watched artists turned electricians and upholsterers can testify.

As much effort and guile went into the precise casting of the neon lights into geometric abstracts and the swaddling of the walls and floor in plastic cloth as ever was expended on the crafting of electrical signs that proclaim the virtues of second-hand cars or the gustatory delights of drive-ins.

SO SURE ARE we that neon was born only to serve such pragmatic ends that we feel ill at ease when bid to consider these iridescent things for what they are, things of beauty.

Long ago a similar uphill battle was fought and won — that liberated painting from being a menial to its subject matter. It appears now obvious enough that, to be art, a picture need not describe cows grazing or the features of one's favorite aunt.

About 1890 Maurice Denis had defined painting as "col-

ors on a plane in a certain order arranged." After 80 years of mulling over this once revolutionary formula, we all agree as to its truth.

To put it crudely, art, at its most precious core, is useless, useless in terms of our everyday needs and greeds.

MAURICE DENIS, it is true, thought of the art object as unique, hand-crafted to fit the exacting taste of its maker. Denis thought in terms of the 19th century. By contrast, TILT is built with ready-made objects, machine-made by the tens of thousands in a factory.

Considered as art, the ready-made is a specific product of our 20th century. It is a child of Dada, born healthy out of the head of one Frenchman, Marcel Duchamps. In the 1910s Marcel's magical wand transformed plumbing fixtures and bicycle wheels into art, and this without retouching or modifying them!

To fulfill its function a wheel must hug the road. Duchamps wrenched it away from the ground, turned it upside down — pattes en l'air — and exhibited it on a pedestal. Become a statue, the wheel, willy-nilly, entered the realm of art.

SO CONVINCING was the demonstration that the conventional barriers between

the ready-made and the fine arts were never rebuilt. Through the breach poured the surrealists in the thirties and, in the sixties, the Pop artists.

Andy Warhol chose for his muse a can of Campbell soup. Jasper Johns cast beer cans in bronze. In Hawaii, in 1964, Duane Preble put up a pioneer show. Called STREET it condensed in frighteningly convincing fashion all mechanical aids to traffic — stop-and-go lights, speed warnings, tow-away signs, one-way arrows.

One walked over the geometric abstracts, white on black, of pedestrian crossings, and the herringbone designs of parking lots. Sound tracks blared disharmonies: the howling of sirens, the thumps of pile-drivers, the rumbles of cement mixers.

PREBLE'S vision of the world was of the world as it is. TILT has in common with STREET the use of ready-made objects, but the rest is contrasts. STREET picked its ingredients from metal heaps and garbage cans. TILT prefers its accessories fresh out of their virginal cellophane. Even the plastic sheets that shroud the room are brand new.

TILT is not meant as a resigned or an amused bow to our habitat as it is. It recesses itself somewhat haughtily from the street into a niche

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by Jean Charlot



right angles. This lean blueprint was fuzzed over and transformed into a sort of magical grotto.

LIKE A growth of stalactites and stalagmites, crystalline prisms of light bulge or recess. The mechanical harshness of neon tubes is swaddled in transparencies that soften the geometry in atmospheric haze. The floor in its loose plastic shroud acquires an uncertain plumb and the sheen of subterranean dampness.

When in India last year, we paid a surprise visit to the Center for Transcendental Meditation. It is mostly a village of individual cells, each built to fit a single hermit. There Maharashi Yogi, not so long ago, enriched the Beatles with a gift of silence, if only temporarily.

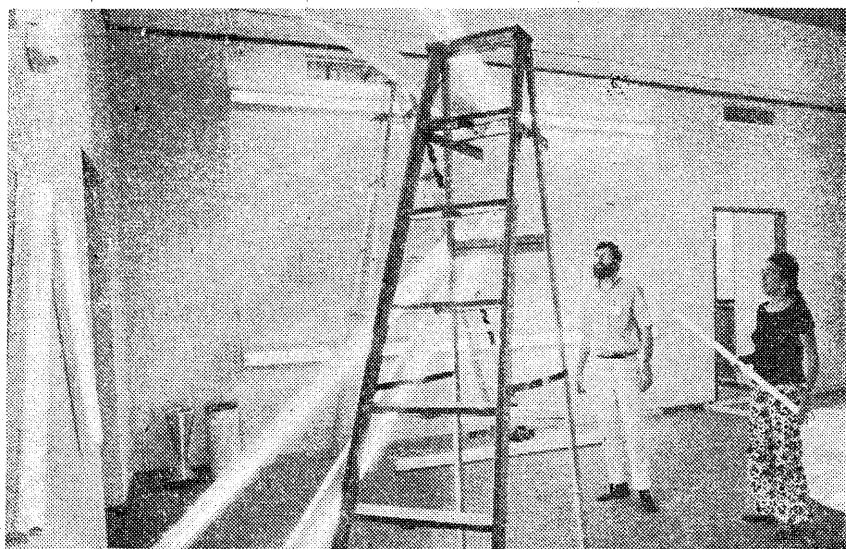
Outside this city of refuge landlocked northern India exists at its toughest. Our jungle trail was crossed by that of wild elephants, marked by snapped tree trunks and pounded ground.

AND OUTSIDE the jungle, much of India is equally frightening, being a dense agglutination of humans that shifts and spills in uneasy turmoil. As an antidote, intense spirituality is considered by Hindus to be a must.

TILT wishes to awake here at home some similar awareness of the therapy of repose. This show is a first sketch, built provisionally, of a visual habitat that could meet this very real need.

conducive to meditation. to answer its new function. Towards this purpose the first care of the team of artists was to reshape the room. The naked hall is a plain cube, with ceiling, walls and floor, meeting as expected at

see full text.



LIKE A GROWTH — Prisms of light bulge or recess as the artists contemplate their work in the process of setting it up. — Photo by Francis Haar.