

NEW WAYS IN PRINTS

Diverse Modern Work In Notable Show

By HOWARD DEVREE

AMONG the fitful flickers of midsummer art activity one which serves several purposes well is the exhibition current this month at the Weyhe Gallery. This is an international selection of contemporary color lithography, part of a biennial event originally assembled at the Cincinnati Art Museum and now being circulated throughout the country by the American Federation of Arts.

Artists of more than twenty nations of Europe, Asia and the Americas are represented in the display, which helps to explain the spectacular rise of interest in prints in the last decade and at the same time reveals the wide variety of theme and method employed by artists today in expanding a traditional medium. There are examples by a number of the most famous contemporary painters, sculptors and graphic artists, including Picasso, Moore, Chagall, Hayter, Arp, Tamayo and Kokoschka among those characteristically represented.

It is a long way from the bullfight lithographs in which the aging Goya tried his hand at the then relatively new medium, or the later biting topical social protest which Daumier infused in his voluminous production, to the fluent abstract use of color in which our Italian contemporary Afro, for instance, echoes his big decorative canvases, or to the Marino Marini in which he executes one of his celebrated horsemen in a flat design which looks as if it might have been inspired by a sculpture cut out of sheet metal. It is even farther from the staid mid-nineteenth century landscapes in black and white to such an abstraction as that of the Scandinavian Karl Axel Pehrson called "Red Breaks In," which might have been originally suggested by a flight of birds or of leaves driven before the wind and is full of linear dynamic drive.

Much Abstraction

In the selection, as might be expected, the field of abstraction reaches far, even to the Orient with its long tradition of realistic woodblock prints. The Japanese Kumi Sugai submits a symbolic abstraction called "Samurai" in big bold black calligraphic forms. The Korean Hang-Sung Lee in "Silhouette" combines something vaguely suggestive of ancient temple painting and wall hanging with quaint fantasy in a highly abstract approach. And even the red figure by M. F. Husain, from India, while strangely reminiscent of classical Persian and Indian miniatures, is abstractly thrown into relief against its splashed-in black and white background.

Among other striking figurative examples is a rather terrifying Tamayo called "The Toast," in which a dispassionately cruel idol-like visage is

illuminated in ghostly light beside a stand on which a wine glass of unholy hue is somehow made further to suggest evil. And the Spanish artist Antoni Clare submits a large composition of two kingly heads with a background of hieratic or cabalistic shapes—the whole done in broken-up blacks and whites with something of the forceful manner of Rouault. Chagall's vivid red King David with his harp contrasts with Dali's "Virgin and Child" in which the two figures are all but lost to recognition in an enclosing flower-like shape sensitively worked out in tonalities.

Figurative Work

At first glance both the Kokoschka and the Picasso lithographs look as if they had been hastily sketched in with broken lines of colored crayon. Kokoschka's "Couple With Pigeon" has a half-realized beach scene background with other figures and the whole is well organized, and Picasso in one of his more playful and experimental moods has done a large profile face made up of little squiggly disconnected lines of color with which he has managed in his own peculiar mastery to convey volume and even a certain grace. Henry Moore's contribution is a theme and variations—six separate seated figures with something of the massiveness and majesty of ancient sculpture in their isolation.

Among the outstanding more representational prints, showing nevertheless the decided influence of abstract principles, are "Rain at Honfleur," a study of building facades with a harbor tug in the foreground in the slanting downpour, by the British artist Alastair Grant, and a moody seacoast landscape akin to some of the late Emil Nolde's water-color impressions, by the Danish artist Suend Englund.

And even for the veriest layman the wide variety of techniques employed in these lithographic statements should prove both fascinating and enlightening.