



The New York Times

Princess Grace of Monaco arrives at inaugural of Georges Pompidou National Center of Arts and Culture

# A Critic's Notebook: Cultural Center Suffers More Slings and Arrows

By HILTON KRAMER  
Special to The New York Times

PARIS, Jan. 31—Even people who openly denounced the design of the new Georges Pompidou National Center of Art and Culture and deplored the money spent on it wanted to be invited to the opening tonight. An invitation to this official ceremony instantly became the latest status symbol, and the bitterness of those who were excluded has sometimes been intense.

Some of the exclusions do seem a little odd to an outsider. There are plans, for example, to make the exhibition of photography an important part of the center's activities, yet one of France's greatest living masters of this medium—Brassai—was not invited to the opening, and he does not disguise the fact that he was deeply hurt by the snub.

The French seem a little uneasy about Brassai, in any case. In New York, his recent book about Paris low life in the 1930's has gone into a second printing, but the French edition has been all but ignored. Other books about his work are being published in Germany, but have yet to find a French publisher. In Paris, he has never received the kind of critical accolades recently accorded him in New York on the occasion of his show at the Marlborough Gallery, and Brassai speaks of his visit to New York last fall with a sense of wonder and gratitude. The homage paid him by so many young and aspiring photographers, he said, was like nothing he had ever experienced.

Everyone here speaks of the Pompidou Center as a colossal "gamble," and while money is not the only thing meant by this, money is clearly a major worry. Already the center receives one-seventh of the entire national budget of the Ministry of Culture—the same proportion that goes to each of two other, more venerable, institutions in Paris: the Paris Opéra and the Comédie Française. The worry is that, with more than half the money allocated each year going to these three Paris centers, the provinces will be cut off with little or nothing.

The problem has obvious political implications, and the Left has been quick to exploit them. The French Communist Party is now calling for a change in the law that

created the center, demanding a more "democratic" policy toward both the public and the artists to be shown there, and the prevention of its "commercialization." What this would mean in practice one can easily guess—artists openly allied with the party would receive special consideration, quite apart from the artistic merits, and "popular" taste would dominate.

At the moment, such suggestions remain only a part of the general political clamor surrounding the center. But should the Socialist-Communist coalition win the next general election here, the Pompidou Center could indeed be turned into something very different from what its present directors envision. In any case, the money issue leaves the center vulnerable to political pressure no matter who wins the election.

It seems, in any event, to be the fate of the Pompidou Center to be attacked as too "radical" by the conservatives and too "conservative" or "commercial" or "elitist" by the radicals. One has the impression, however, that if only the design of the building had been less obviously modern and more innocuous, there would be less of an uproar about—and a good deal less interest in—what is actually shown and done inside.

There is an interesting paradox, then, in the fact that one of the architects of the Pompidou Center—Richard Rogers—is currently living in circumstances far removed from the technical wonders of the building he has helped to design.

Mr. Rogers and his wife, whose permanent home is in London, have been living in Paris for five years while the center has been under construction.

When they applied for a telephone, the Rogerses were told there would be a wait of two and a half years. So the co-designer of this technological miracle—and at the moment, one of the most famous architects in Paris—lives in this modern metropolis without benefit of the most common technological aid to speedy communication. He makes his calls from the corner cafe.

Of the many new art galleries opening near the Pompidou Center, only one—the Galerie Zabriskie at 29 Rue Aubry Le Boucher, a branch of Virginia Zabriskie's well-known gallery on West 57th Street in New York—is devoted solely to photog-

raphy. Occupying three tiny floors of a 13th-century building, the gallery is very handsome, and its opening show of "Ten Contemporary American Photographers"—among them, William Eggleston, Joel Meyerowitz, Stephen Shore and Neal Slavin—gives Paris its first look at some of the more far-out photographic developments in America.

It is the young who constitute a large part of the photography audience everywhere, and it is likely to be they who decide if this development will "take" in Paris. Mrs. Zabriskie, certainly, is very confident that it will, and has planned an ambitious roster of exhibitions, including the first show of Alfred Stieglitz to be mounted in Paris (coming in June).

One gallery that was planned for the area but will not be opening is Denise René's. Described by one critic here as "our Gertrude Stein," Mrs. René had expected to open an elegant establishment designed by Max Bill, the well-known Swiss architect and sculptor, for the exhibition of the constructivist art she has promoted on both sides of the Atlantic for many years. But recent reverses in the European art market have made it impossible for her to go through with the project, and her decision not to open a new gallery has created a certain gloom among dealers and artists here. At the very moment when the Pompidou Center is expected to stimulate new activity in the Paris art world, Mrs. René's defection is taken as a sign that the economy might not support such activity.

Across the river, however, at the Galerie Claude Bernard on the Rue des Beaux-Arts, there are such immense crowds coming to the Francis Bacon exhibition that Mr. Bernard has had to hire extra staff to insure the physical safety of the pictures.

What this signifies about the prosperity or creativity of the Paris art world remains to be seen, but it does mean that the French still turn up in droves for what they regard as an important art event, and it is bound to have a stimulating effect on the Pompidou Center, too.

A review of the Georges Pompidou National Center of Art and Culture appeared in Sunday's Arts and Leisure Section.