

Some Outstanding Paintings

THE 20TH in the series of Irene Leache Memorial competitions opens to the public in the Norfolk Museum today, and, although the selection has some embarrassing weak spots, one certainly cannot fault the judge on his selection of Charles Sibley's painting "The Chimp" for the major prize.

J. Robert Burnell won second prize, and smaller individual prizes also went to Virginia Adams, Frederick Brandt, Ruth Laasko, A. B. Jackson, and Robert McCullough.

As in the past few years, the show has attracted an assortment of artists from neighboring states, nearly 60 from North Carolina, Washington, D.C., and Maryland, which livens matters up considerably, and at least one of these, John Chapman Lewis, gives the proceedings an extraordinary boost. Altogether there were 661 paintings submitted by 295 artists, but the show in its final form numbers only 86 works by 82 artists.

With such a winnowing out one would be entitled to expect a little more of the show than it offers, and it is painful to see that a number of unfortunate paintings have been honored by being included. Perhaps it would be more direct to call them outright failures, really bad things, and they are there in all styles, abstraction, realism—you name it.

Somehow, the Irene Leache has been plagued by this in the past, although probably not a great deal more than other juried shows. But because it is such an important event, with \$2,000 in awards and a great deal of selling power and prestige, it seems double important that its standards be higher.

On the other hand, there is plenty of outstanding painting in the show. Among the non-prize-winners who distinguished themselves are Lewis, whose "El Dorado" is nothing short of breathtaking, Fay Zetlin, with a blue painting of great beauty, and Bernard Martin, whom I consider to be one of the finest painters in the state, although his "Standing Figure" is not his very best work. These people, I imagine, and many others were inconvenienced by the old regulation confining entries to less than six feet, a rule that really should be relaxed, since so many serious artists have scaled their canvases beyond that nowadays.

Nicholas Isaak and Reginald Case, both of whom teach at Norfolk State College, have contributed first rate still lifes, and perennial professionals like Barclay Sheaks, John Curran, Jack Clifton, Allan Jones, and Herb Jones (to name a few) certainly help to keep things presentable. I was quite impressed by Charles Kello's little oil "Beachscape," which is loaded with virtuoso painting, and by the work of Erling Berge, a tidy realist of a more meticulous na-

ture, as shown in his landscape "My Old Neighborhood." Among the others who are noteworthy are Jerry Coulter, Barbara Ames, Robin Partin, Cameron Bone-Kemper, James Kirby, Robert Barbee, and Suzanne Ferguson.

And, of course, there is Sibley's simian portrait of a caged and curiously human beast, a painting that ought to slow anyone down. One's first inclination might be to humor, but it readily becomes apparent that this is a serious business with serious implications, and a rapport with the chimpanzee is quickly established. As in his serious paintings of the past, Sibley leaves us there, right in the midst of an enigmatic but meaningful experience, to fend for ourselves. The exhibit will continue at the museum through April 1.

ONE ANSWER to the pitfalls of a juried show is the alternative of the invitational exhibit. There are few of these, partially because the jurying chore puts the burden on the back of an out-of-town expert, who usually gets back out of town in a hurry. But a responsible invitational show could unveil the best efforts by many of the best artists and one opened here late last week attempting to do just that. The occasion is the opening of Virginia Wesleyan's new Henry Clay Hofheimer II Library, and part of the celebration centers on the school's first invitational exhibit. Having glimpsed it last week in fragmentary form, I can report

that it should be a good one. I hope to review it here next Sunday.

DURING the month of March, the 20th Century Gallery in Williamsburg is featuring recent paintings, sculpture and drawings by Carlton Abbott. As a matter of fact, however, the work is not so recent that it does not include some of the stronger things that Abbot showed in his Norfolk Museum show last fall, but even in the newer pieces, he continues to produce elegant and cool things, whether they be his flowing linear drawings or his wood constructions under domes of glass. While the current show is something of an echo of his Norfolk exhibit, it is further proof that he is a thoroughly professional artist to whom a rather minimal style is well suited and that his visual language of cool elegance (forgive me for repeating the words, but they are apt), his use of color and his immaculate technique are something special.

THE GALLERY of Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, N.C. has announced the schedule of its next juried show, which has the attraction of some \$1,500 in prizes. The exhibit will be judged by Bryan O'Doherty, a sculptor and critic who writes for The New York Times, and work in sculpture, painting and graphics will be included. The deadline is March 31. For entry blanks and further details, write to the gallery in Winston-Salem at 300 South Main Street.