

A mad Swiss artist

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through him, all of us. He assured us that, after all, we had not seen the last of him. Anyone passing into Buckinghamshire will be assured of a warm welcome in his home, even if a "No Coaches" sign will hang above the entrance!

Dancing and enjoyment went on well after midnight. By then, the fog had lifted, another miracle, and everyone had good road conditions for their journeys home.

Ermanno Berner

A MAD SWISS ARTIST

While crowds flocked to see the impressions of Monet, Sisley, Pissarro and other Impressionists on sceneries which they could see in real life by standing on Charing Cross Bridge, a few hundred yards away, it is doubtful whether two large halls on the lower floor of the Hayward Gallery received the same attention. They were devoted to the works of *Dieter Rot*, a Swiss painter born in Switzerland but often considered as a German due to the fact that he has lived a long time in Germany.

Dieter Rot embodies a tendency which is often found among German-Swiss artists: a genius for extravagance and absurdity all the more striking in comparison to the generally staid and conservative environment in which they work.

Rot obviously poked fun at those who were trying to understand whether he had any message to convey. Several large frames covered with a shining plate of glass contained a little box in which there was just nothing, or a little piece of crumpled paper. Other displays of a simi-

lar vein consisted of newspapers slashed into strips with a razor blade, or an ugly scribble on a huge, empty background. In fact, the closest example of the actual promotion of human and animal excrement to the status of an artistic theme could be witnessed during February at the Hayward Gallery. Some doubt remains whether the lumpy, brownish and amorphous things enframed on the walls

of the gallery were real, hardened animal droppings, or whether they were just a heavy caking of paint.

Other glorious brain children of Rot's enflamed imagination consisted of books hanging from pieces of string with pages full of meaningless nonsense or one same monosyllable repeated over a whole page. Hardly the kind of literature one would be tempted to take on a flight from London to Geneva. Presumably, these items have to be taken with plenty of sense of humour. They are, after all, fairly funny visual jokes.

Rot nevertheless managed to prove that he still belonged to the world of sanity with a series of dazzling graphic displays, painted photographs and patterns in which he carried his experiments in the art of composing symphonies of shapes and colours a very long way.

For those with no preconceived ideas about art, the Rot exhibition should be entertaining and instructive. A third exhibition on the intricacies of producing Shakespearean plays was also staged on the lower floor by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

WAITING FOR HOWARD HUGHES

The spectral millionaire looked after by a compatriot

Mr. Hughes was staying at the time with his aides.

Over a year ago, the Rothschild International Bank in the City made a reservation at the Inn on the Park Hotel, which rises off Park Lane at a minute's walk away from the Dorchester. They asked its Manager, Mr. Eugene Wagner, a Swiss of London known to many in the Colony, to book 2 suites and 10 rooms covering practically all the west side of the ninth floor of his hotel.

Rothschild's had done regular business with Inn on the Park. Moreover, they were Mr. Howard Hughes' bankers and Mr. Wagner soon realised the likely identity of the future guest that required such vast accommodation. His hunch was confirmed when he was asked to alter the decoration of the suites in order to conform to the recluse millionaire's taste. In particular, the wallpapering of the rooms was changed.

Howard Hughes (owner of Hughes Aircraft, Hughes Machine Tools and a good part of Las Vegas, and former owner of TWA) arrived with hardly any advance warning. His trip appeared to have been made in such haste that arrangements had not even been made for the renewal of his passport. The eccentric millionaire who has not been seen for fifteen years managed to pass through the Customs at London Airport thanks to top-level intervention.

Mr. Wagner himself claims he never saw him as he disappeared in his suites and has hidden behind its closed blinds ever since. But the Press were soon enough on the spot and caused a couple of hectic weeks to Mr. Wagner and his staff. Invaded with feretting journalists and various brands of nuts who were prepared to go to any extravagance and expense to catch a glimpse of Howard Hughes, Mr. Wagner had to hire special Securicor guards and double the usual security arrangements of the hotel. Nearly every important paper in Europe and the U.S. booked a room for their special correspondents in the Hotel. All of them came home empty-handed, thanks to the efficient organisation setup at the Inn on the Park. Some reporters even questioned whether Howard Hughes actually existed.

HECTIC ARRIVAL

Mr. Howard Hughes had long planned to fly over to London and had made advance arrangements with his London bankers. They had recommended the Inn on the Park. His surprise arrival in London was precipitated by the earthquake that devastated (on Christmas Eve) Managua, the Nicaraguan capital, where

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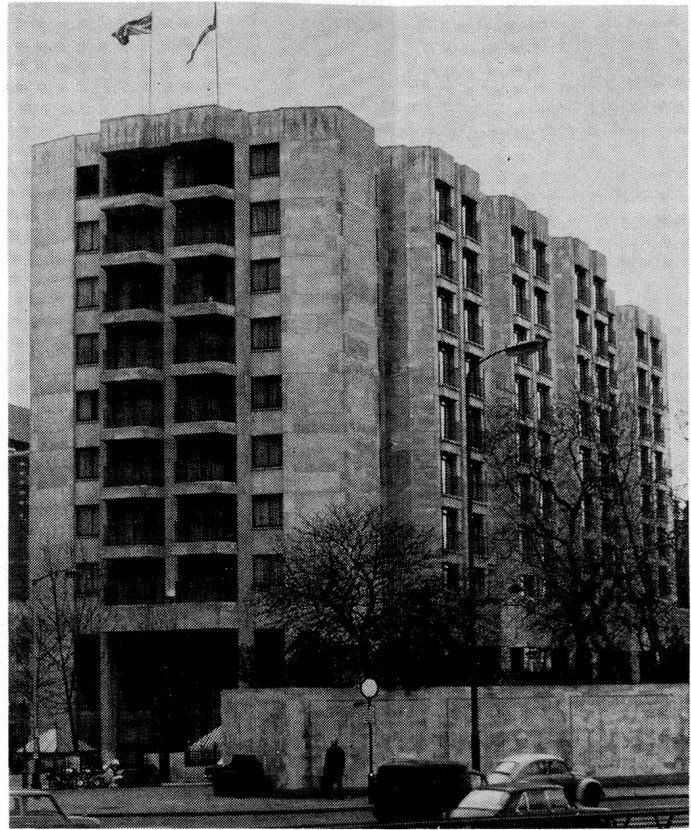
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NO ONE KNOWS MORE THAN WHAT THE PRESS GUESSES

Now that the flurry of the initial weeks has subsided and that life is back to normal at the Inn on the Park, Mr. Wagner himself admits he has no more proof than the Press about Mr. Hughes' presence within his premises. All he claims to know is that two suites and ten rooms have been booked for Rothschild's of London, known to be Hughes' bankers. He knows that these ten rooms are occupied and their occupants are registered under names which do not feature that of Howard Hughes. Contrary to Swiss hotel practise, guests do not have to sign a special police slip — so that anyone can register at the Reception under an assumed name. Mr. Wagner also knows that Mr. Hughes, or whoever he is, and the dozen or so aides (said to be Mormons) who are supposed to accompany him (and live in various parts of the hotel) pay their bills regularly.

Apart from the Hotel's laundry, there appear to be no other physical means of ascertaining Mr. Hughes' presence. His meals are cooked in a kitchen set up in his suite. Some journalists have in fact tried to glean information from the maids responsible for changing Mr. Hughes' used linen.

Mr. Wagner can only suppose that Howard Hughes is upstairs and believe the Press. He is not in a position to confirm whether a heart specialist was called



Somewhere behind those windows on the top floor of the Inn on the Park Hotel, the recluse millionaire Howard Hughes is asleep and probably dreaming of the world he has decided to abandon so long ago. He'll wake up at nightfall and look after his Empire when other humans leave their worries behind.



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over from America and thinks that Howard Hughes is in good health. Mr. Wagner told me, however, that the eccentric millionaire had as yet made no plans to leave and appears to be remaining at the Inn on the Park indefinitely.

A MILLION POUNDS WORTH OF FREE PUBLICITY

A million pounds worth of free publicity is, of course, good publicity for the hotel. The coverage which was given to Mr. Hughes in every part of the world was worth millions of pounds of entirely free advertisement. Mr. Wagner is justifiably proud that his premises should have been recommended by one of the world's most reputable merchant banks. After all, Mr. Wagner not only manages the Inn on the Park, but has also designed it.

However, the London branch of the Four-Seasons international group of hotels can survive without such publicity: The Inn on the Park recorded a 95 per cent occupancy factor during 1972.



The Swiss flag flutters gloriously above Mr. Wagner's hotel entrance.

LONDON PREMIÈRE OF A SWISS FILM

A Swiss film was recently shown in the West End for the first time. After having enjoyed considerable success in Paris, Alain Tanner's *La Salamandre* came to the Academy Cinema, Oxford Street, and immediately won good acclaim from several national papers.

There is no Swiss cinema industry and very few films have been produced that can be regarded as Swiss. Two examples are *Heidi* and *Sept Hommes en Or*, the latter relating an exciting gold heist in the vaults of the Swiss Credit Bank in Geneva. To our knowledge, this film was never shown abroad.

La Salamandre is representative of actual Swiss production. Known in French as "Cinema d'auteur", it is actually intended for a Festival audience or a rather initiated public. With another of Tanner's successes *Charles mort ou vif*, this appears to be the first of his films to have broken in the commercial circuit. Made on a shoestring budget (approximately 200,000 francs) and unknown actors with names betraying Genevese origins, *La Salamandre* could prove the stepping stone to more ambitious and technically involved works. *La Salamandre* was shot in black and white with a 16 mm. camera and its image was blown up.

The technical amateurism of the film does not in any way diminish its fine qualities. Its success should allow Tanner to obtain financial backing for yet greater works and become, who knows, Switzerland's Bergman.

The plot is simple and adapted to the small means available to its cineast-director. A journalist named Pierre receives a proposal by a television producer to write a story on an unresolved case: a straying young girl named Rosemonde living in the care of her uncle is accused by him of having attempted to murder him with a military rifle, but the case had been dropped for lack of evidence. Pierre is asked to investigate the case and write a story. However, as he is tied up with a series of articles on Swiss investments in Brazil, he asks his friend Paul, a builder with a yen for writing, to help him to shape the story. After some hesitation, Paul accepts the deal and both launch on a voyage with Rosamonde from which they emerge more involved than they bargained for.

With its simple and sincere script, *La Salamandre* reveals the life of a disorientated young girl, roosting in her existential vacuum and erring from job to job. The film depicts the difficulty of

living and being in Switzerland in the 20th century. Tanner makes few concessions. He views his country with distance and irony. The setting is Geneva in Winter. Far from the mountain pastures and the dazzling snow usually associated with our country. The trams of Geneva, which somehow play an important role in the sets, come and go in the background. It is rainy and there is sludge in the streets. A weakness of the film lies in its effort to imitate intellectual French productions,

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