

A Short Stroll Through Square Des Arts

I FEEL A stab of conscience every time I walk by Dominion Square. All those paintings lurking among the elm trees, waiting to be inspected and reviewed. Well, sooner or later something had to be done about them, so I stopped by this week, fortified myself with a glass of spruce beer, and took a good look. And, wonder of wonders, there were a few pleasant surprises.

What with the excellent sculptures on the slopes of Mount Royal, and in the Botanical Gardens, more paintings at the Mount Royal Art Centre and the Maisonneuve Recreation Centre, Montreal does seem to have acquired the right to call itself the City of Art.

The only question is: what sort of art? Is it selected and designed so that it can be seen out of the corner of the eye on a fast stroll through the square or does it have more permanent pretensions? Well, the fact is that a few things — a very few, admittedly — in the Square des Arts exhibition are very good indeed and they would hold their own in any surroundings. As for the rest, I think a breathless commuter heading for Windsor Station could be forgiven if he

By Michael Ballantyne

gave them no more than a fast blink.

It's not so much that the artists are inept but that they never rise above a certain level of mediocrity. We're in Dullsville, man, as a hip friend remarked.

WHAT I WOULD LIKE to see happen is for the authorities, the Parks and Playgrounds Department, exercise a little more discretion, a little more discipline, exact stricter standards. I think they could do it and still come up with a large enough group to fill the outdoor gallery.

There are at least a half dozen painters represented in the current show who deserve wider audience and a better display. Especially, I feel, two artists whom I remember from an exhibition in the Maisonneuve Centre last winter.

They are Pierre Soulikias and Régis Cavalli. I have now seen a grand total of two canvases by each man and on the basis of this minuscule acquaintance, am more than anxious to see many more. Mr. Soulikias, I must assume, is a landscapist — and a very good one. He has a Laurentian scene on view which is

absolutely delightful, beautifully constructed and bathed in some of the softest, most exhilarating greens I have ever seen. Mr. Soulikias merits a Gallery XII, show some day soon and I hope he gets it.

Régis Cavalli is nowhere near so sophisticated a technician — he would, I imagine, be classed as a primitive — but he possesses an undeniable vigor, freshness and gaiety which is extremely attractive. The painting which he calls "La Ferme Isidore" is small in size and perfectly composed within its limits. He works entirely in bright, basic colors — red, blue, green, white — with a minimum of fuss and straight, uncomplicated brushwork. I don't mean, however, to suggest that Cavalli is some kind of nine-day wonder and I rather think that his talent is more likely to be a case of art concealing art.

AND SINCE I PUT in a modest plug for Mr. Soulikias, perhaps I might recommend Cavalli to the people in charge at the Stable Gallery where a fine exhibition of Canadian primitives is on view until September.

I am bound to mention as well