

Modern art in outer space?

ART NEWS

By Hunter Drohojowska

Do artists have "The Right Stuff"? Should there be artist-in-residence fellowships in outer space? Herald art critic Christopher Knight received a letter asking his opinions of this idea from James Pridgeon, an artist in Seattle who is NASA's principle investigator for a program on artists in space.

In the process of submitting a proposal for his own outer-space sculpture — "a large inflatable... something very shiny and very big in order to be seen 200 miles from earth" — he saw a void in the NASA program. He approached the Innovative Utilization of the Space Station Program, a subgroup of the NASA Space Station Task Force, about doing a feasibility study to put artists on the Space Station. He admits "they hadn't thought too seriously about it in the past and thought it would be a good idea to check it out."

NASA received 300 proposals and funded 18, but Pridgeon's was the only one to explore the possibilities for artists on the Space Station. Pridgeon has sent letters to organizations and leading art figures around the country. "I've been trying to assess interest (in the art community) without creating a landslide. Since there's no program, I'm hesitant about... creating expectations." Pridgeon admits that he was pessimistic when he started but says he is more encouraged now. "The Space Act allows private citizens to fly for educational purposes; they'll want a good communicator and that could be an artist." But he also warns that the Space Station isn't supposed to be built until 1990 at the earliest, and there is no guarantee his program will be approved. "I wouldn't get excited about buy-



Scene from "Available Light."

ing a ticket," he said.

At the conclusion of "Available Light," last week's premiere performance at the Museum of Contemporary Art's temporary facility, the audience, notably the reviewers, were confused. Although the dancers from Lucinda Childs' New York-based company were said to have been choreographed to accommodate Frank Gehry's two-sided stage, many viewers noticed that the dance appeared to have been arranged for the single view of a conventional proscenium theater. Coincidentally, "Available Light" will be performed next at just such a venue: the opera house of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Was the choreography a concession to the New York audience — the audience that "counts"? One disgruntled observer pointed out that it's immaterial whether those were Childs' intentions. "The dance wasn't any good from the front, either," he said.

Another first at the J. Paul Getty Museum opens today — an exhibition of rare Renaissance manuscripts from the British Library. The Renaissance is the period of the last great flowering of manuscript illumination. Never before has such a large and important group of the library's holdings

been lent for an independent exhibition in America, let alone Malibu. The show was organized by Derek Turner and Linda Backhouse of the British Library and Thomas Kren, associate curator of paintings at the Getty.

Kren, who has a special interest in the field, pointed out that the manuscripts have a distinct relationship to Renaissance paintings in that both Northern and Southern artists demonstrated their interests in illusionism and naturalism. "The Italians developed it in a more theoretical vein, with more geometric structure. The Northern painters were more into the effects of light, they took a more optical approach to what they saw. This is reflected in the manuscripts as well as the paintings. One couldn't do an exhibition of comparable Renaissance paintings anymore," he continued, "because so many important works from the period are on panel — they are impossible to borrow. So it's important to do a show of Renaissance work of the quality of these manuscripts."

The exhibition features 25 of the finest Italian, French and Flemish manuscripts in the British Library, including a total of 45 illuminations, commencing at the middle of the 15th century with Jean Fouquet, the greatest French illuminator of the day, and culminating in the 16th century with Simon Bening, the leading Flemish manuscript illuminator. The exhibition will continue through Jan. 8, 1984.

The Getty also announced the appointment of Kurt W. Forster as director of the Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. Forster was born and educated in Switzerland, studied in Germany, England and Italy, and received his Ph.D. in the history of art from University of Zurich in 1961. His interests focus on art of the Renaissance and certain aspects of modern art and architecture, and he has written books on Antelami, Pontormo and Mannerist painting. He has taught at Yale, Berkeley, Stanford and M.I.T., and has also studied the humanities, which is essential to the interdisciplinary nature of the center.

James Rubeamen/Herald photographer