

Art: In a Far-off World

Carmen Cicero Makes Color Sing in His Show at the Peridot Gallery

By BRIAN O'DOHERTY

THERE'S a jewel of a show at the Peridot, 820 Madison Avenue at 67th Street. The artist's name combines grand opera with classical overtones — Carmen Cicero. He paints up to his name. In fact, it's one of those shows that sends you out on the town with a dizzy joy. Before going on, let's sober up briefly and establish our frame of reference: This is a superb minor show. The color sings and sings with as clear and pure a tone as Eddie Calvert's trumpet.

It's more than just painting, however. Take a few of the pictures: "The Stars and Stripes Forever" is a lyrical comment on chauvinism, "Miss America" — radiantly ripe between the front half of a centaur and two trigonometric figures that look as if they were measuring her curves—hails the direct descendant of a Roman vestal virgin. In a word, apart from just painting, Mr. Cicero comments. His themes are partly "pop" (one's eyes are popping these days), but he raises them from the level of the Jack Benny wisecracks to the level of the witty short story.

He does it mainly through the color, which gives a feeling of release from tension, of a private breakthrough. In fact, the Ciceronian color is as soothing to headache tension as two Bufferins are. He draws arcs over and through the color as if painting from the shoulder, then the elbow, the wrist, and finally to straight line with finger and thumb. All the time he keeps to the rhythm, counterpointing the color in a fascinating way so that his paintings swing—high, pure, a bit sweet, not too jazzy.

If these pieces weren't just joyous, if they had a shade less exuberance about their parody (one thinks of that curvaceous Matisse cutie), if they didn't hit such "just-right" visual combinations, they would be shallow. Only one, the "Seducer," fails to come off.

Above all, Mr. Cicero removes everything lock, stock and barrel to his own far-off world, where people inbreed with geometry — at times looking like steamrolled de Chirico mannequins. In fact, Mr. Cicero comments on that quality of his to transform the transverse. Two people, one of his typical chick-

What one misses most in New York, you'll find in Edward Corbett's fine paintings at Borgenicht's, 1018 Madison at 78th Street—the horizon. Everything that interrupts it is cleared away, allowing the eye to exercise gratefully its age-old instinct to separate sky and water or land. Absolutely clear, absolutely vacant, a green sky over an orange strand fixes the attention on a turning sliver of wave between — as it falls soundlessly far away in some telescopic distance. The interesting thing is that the fall of this anonymous wave, in such magnified isolation, is achingly poignant and almost terrible. A profound psychological distillation is made from completely abstract means.

This will give some hint of Mr. Corbett's capacity. The interesting point with regard to his means is that hollow distance is created without perspective or convergence, but just by color alone. In some paintings Mr. Corbett stands the horizon on end so that it runs vertically. They are totally empty. It is like a demonstration of how much his paintings depend on the stability and associations of that horizontal line.