

Holding order, chaos in tense balance

by Sasha Grishin

OTTO NEMITZ:
Paintings — 1973-76,
Susan Gillespie Galleries,
22 Bouganville Street, Manuka,
July 16 till July 29, Daily
10.30am till 5.30pm

O T T O Nemitz's paintings are a form of structured constructivism; at the same time as striving for a strict sense of order he sets up deliberate obstacles which threaten to plunge the composition into disorder. Nemitz's art depends on the tension achieved between the imposed order and the subdued chaos.

Canvases are stretched over embedded obstacles which produce bulges, ridges and furrows in the picture surface. Layers of canvas are superimposed, buckled and wrinkled.

On top of this real created space and actual physical texture of the surface is imposed a cold, precise, almost geometrically derived design. They are smooth exacting forms that conform to their own logic and are built around a linear harmony.

Fantastic

Nemitz's forms remind one of mechanical parts and engineering shapes that all seem to fit into some fantastic piece of machinery that only requires a single missing in-

redient before the entire things would whirl into action.

A quality of tension and anticipation dominates Nemitz's work: the potential kinetic action of the forms; the suppressed spatial ambiguity which at any moment will throw the precarious balance out of joint and the deceptive simplicity of the compositional arrangement.

The beholder is invited to follow the forms through and is given just enough clues to encourage him further in the exploration, but never quite enough to lead him to an actual conclusion. Bold articulating lines start at an arbitrary point and lead to nowhere; you are never certain what form these lines are meant to be defining. As you lose your bear-

ings, your references to time and space, you are hypnotically drawn into the canvas.

Confusion

A major failing of a number of the paintings is that there is too much happening at the same time and you are confronted by a disjointed confusion. The paintings which I found worked best were the simpler drawings such as

Nos 13 and 16 where the colour range is monochromatic and the implied spatial conflict is simplified.

On the whole, this exhibition, co-sponsored by the Goethe Institute, is both an interesting and rewarding experience. Otto Nemitz stands the traditional imagery of constructivism on its head to produce a disciplined and structured reality built on ambiguous and deceptive foundations.