

Art: Another Museum

Early American Works Will Be Exhibited

By STUART PRESTON

ANOTHER art museum for New York? Another museum between St. Thomas Church and the Avenue of the Americas? It's a fact.

Today, the Museum of Early American Folk Arts, the first of its kind in this city, opens its doors in a modest, reconditioned building at 49 West 53d Street.

The new organization's purpose is, in its own words, to "create for the general public the atmosphere of America's background, showing the arts which delighted our forebears and continue to delight us now, arts to which we contribute by adding the values of tradition and respect."

Folk art is to mean art done by unsophisticated, untutored but natural artists whose styles embody either naive memories of an official style, or half-understood imitations of the same. For folk artists, mute inglorious popular imagists that they are, many of whose names are lost to recorded history, rarely possess truly inventive gifts. Nonetheless, at its best, their work has a freshness of impact and a contagious fancy that many an academic artist might well envy. And folk art thrived particularly in the United States, a country for so many long years deprived of academic leadership.

The museum's program will comprise a series of changing exhibitions of works of art of many kinds from different times and places in this country. At first they will be largely borrowed from both public and private sources. But gradually the museum hopes to build up its own collection.

The first exhibition includes 40 or more paintings, pieces of sculpture and related objects dating from the early eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century. Most of the paintings are portraits, some of decidedly wooden charm. One, that of a beautiful woman in black, by Ammi Phillips, has a flowing rhythmical design which, for its elegant complexity, would do no discredit to Ingres. And a pair of portraits of children has the linear stylishness of Boutet de Monvel. Elsewhere are cigar store Indians, weather-vanes, and an astonishing 8-foot copper statue of an Indian that came from the top of a Connecticut barn.

The Museum of Early American Folk Arts, whose director is George Montgomery, will be open from 11 A.M. to 6 P.M. daily except Mondays.

For a number of years now corporate patronage of the fine arts on a high level has been the public relations policy of Container Corporation of America. Its principal activity has been the commissioning of outstanding painters and sculptors, European and American, to illustrate "Great Ideas of Western Man—Arts and Ideas in Mass Communications."

An exhibition, opening to-



"Liberty," painted wood, on exhibit at the Museum of Early American Folk Arts.

morrow at the Time-Life Building Exhibition Gallery, Avenue of the Americas at 50th Street, includes a selection of 60 of these commissioned works of art in a retrospective show covering 25 years of this patronage.

The names of some of the artists represented here, Léger, de Kooning, Magritte, Nivola, Baskin, Albers, Shahn, Tamayo, Graves, Tobey, Baziot, Stuart Davis and Henry Moore give some idea of the distinguished quality of the show. They may not always be at their best, but it is never less than fascinating to see how they symbolize a moral idea or a thought.

The exhibits differ greatly in character. Some artists, like Frasconi with Goethe, simply portray the subject and include the quotation within the picture. Others, like Carol Summers with Santayana, or Herbert Bayer with St. Paul, employ the language of abstract symbolism. Still others stick rigidly to their own style, whatever the purport of the "great idea" may be.

There are many odd appositions of art and thought here. Does Magritte do more than Milton can to justify God's ways to Man? Challenges abound in these fittings together. Any many of the quotations are almost oppressively high-minded, yielding very little to the poor artist. The toughest assignment of all was given to the sculptor Luise Kaish, asked to symbolize Frederick the Great on Tolerance. What, one wonders, is that flinty-hearted and cynical monarch doing here, in the company of St. Francis of Assisi, Confucius, and Spinoza?

The exhibition will be on view until Oct. 27.