

The warehouse at the end of the century

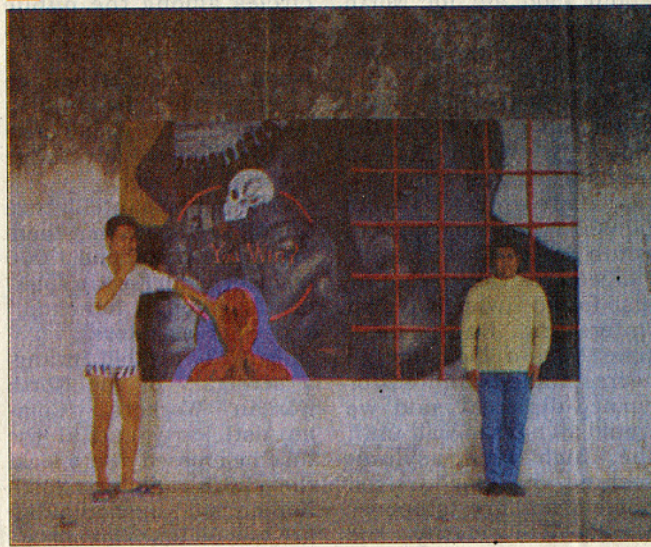
By Felix Schoeber

A certain *fin de siècle* state of mind is responsible for a rather unusual exhibition called "Roam Finale," located in the "Abnormal Temple" — a warehouse on the grounds of a mental hospital in San Chih on Taiwan's northern coast.

The show, staged by six local and foreign artists, concentrates on what has been defined as "communicative noise" by some French philosophers. The concept describes what is left when acts of communication become meaningless, empty activities and only noise remains.

Or, as artist Yao Jui-chung interprets the idea, when nothing but black feces pours out of an open mouth. Yao's giant mural shows the trepanned head of a man, his brain cavity exposed and the gray matter replaced with a bubbling black mass. It's hard to decide whether the wide open mouth is swallowing or vomiting the black sausage coming out of it.

The mural is painted in black ink on the white lime wall of the abandoned warehouse. With the dilapidated roof of the building admitting shafts of sunlight and with debris scattered on the ground, the artwork is not so much disgusting in its



content but rather eerie in its cold observation of the human condition.

Yao is one of the artists who will represent Taiwan at this year's Venice Biennial of Contemporary Art and has worked with well-known Taiwanese film director Edward Yang.

In a similar mood but different mode is the work of international video artist Antoni Muntadas. As a dark grumbling sound echoes around the walls of the vaulted warehouse, one is gripped

by a compulsion to search for the source of the strange, unsettling siren call. After entering a dark tunnel through a broken door, one is attracted by a blue light at the end of the tunnel. Clambering across debris, wooden planks and rusted steel rods and ducking to avoid green slings hanging from the cracked ceiling, one arrives at a slowly moving image of two hands in front of a black-suited male belly. The belly is moving — folding and unfolding in super-



slow motion, accompanied by these strange dark grumbling sounds.

One of the Taiwanese artists explains: the video is a recording of a man's hand gestures and voice during an intense business discussion. By playing the film in super-slow motion, the man's voice is transformed into something more like the echo of crumbling stones and the viewer perceives the man's persuasive gestures in a state of hyper-sensitivity, rendering them meaningless movements in the air.

Same mood, yet another mode: Lai Jeou-tsern's mural features human bones and body parts mingled chaotically on the front wall of warehouse while Tsai Ju -chun's oil paintings question the difference between life and death, win-

ning and losing, freedom and imprisonment. Chatting with the artists, such *l'expressions du jour* as "postmodernism," "nomadism" and "Generation X" float around the ruined space and it's hard to deny that they are apt. But Yao says it's the residents of the nearby hospital for the mentally ill, dropping in for a friendly visit, who cut through all the pretentious art talk: "It's just such beautiful art," they say.

LEFT: Two patients from a nearby mental hospital present one of Tsai Ju-chun's works entitled "The Existence of Faded Color."

BELOW LEFT: Artist Yao Jui-chung poses with one of his murals, a stark comment on the degradation of communication.

✓ The location of the Roam Finale exhibition is only accessible by private transport. Take the Teng Hui Road from Tamsui to Chin Shan and after about 15 minutes look for a signpost on the right reading (in Chinese) "Tung Fang Ching Hsin." Enter the compound and head for the last red warehouse. The exhibition runs through Sunday, April 13th. For more information, call Yao Jui-chung on (02) 847-2064 or 706-8034.