The Pittsburgh International

French, English and American Painting

By Royal Cortissoz

The annual show at Carnegie Institute, in Pittsburgh, is in the nature of a report, recording what the leading schools of the world are doing. It brings Paris and London to our doors. From a certain point of view it might be asserted that the report this year is incomplete. It omits the modernists. But as a matter of fact in sifting out those gentry it performs a useful service, simplifying the subject and concentrating attention upon the really significant things. In excluding freakishness it leaves room for art. We see enough in all conscience, everywhere, of the painters who distinguish themselves chiefly by their violation of the rectitude of painting. In this exhibition we may observe the men and women who for good or for ill are faithful to their national standards. They have been appreciatively treated by the Institute authorities. The collection of about three hundred pictures is beautifully hung. The foreigners have galleries by themselves. This makes for an ensemble that is orderly, convenient, and, as it happens, very interesting.

French Art

Its Adherence to the Atmosphere of the Salon

There is a picture in the French section which has the character of a monument, Besnard's "Under the Willows." It was painted as far back as 1909, but its appearance in its present environment is apposite. It sums up the brighest virtues of the Salon, the good drawing and modeling, the beautiful color, of an artist who is nothing if not a good workman. That is what makes him representative. He stands for the French mastery of technique. He stands, of course, for more than this. Besnard has individuality, distinction. He remains what he has been for years, the leading master of his school. But what makes his picture especially suggestive is just its embodiment of traditional merits. It gives the visitor the handiest kind of a touchstone. Looking at the French group as a whole, one can see that it is absolutely homogeneous, devotedly concerned, as the Salon has been for generations, with honest craftsmanship. The younger men unmistakably recognize Besnard as their standard bearer. Their ideal of artistic integrity is like unto his. The differences perceptible here and there are differences of personality, of taste, not of method.

The broad impression received from the French pictures is one of competence. If nothing more were involved in the issue it would be just to say that contemporary French art had maintained itself in the van. But in the matter of those differences to which we have just alluded there comes something like disillusionment. To be faithful to the leadership of Besnard is a good deal. But what if there is only one Besnard? There is a curious want of freshness about the French show. The modernists are on the wrong track, but their discontent with the conservatives is understandable. The very virtues of the Salon grow a bit depressing when they subside into routine. There are one or two singularly clear demonstrations of this in the exhibition. The names of Aman-Jean and Jacques Blanche used to be synonymous with progressive ideas. They had originality. They had charm. Now they paint what we can only describe as pot boilers. They and other Frenchmen, artists like Desvallieres, Cottet, Simon and Prinet, have all the easy sophistication in the world, producing unimpeachably well made pictures; but there is not a spark of inspiration left in their work. They have trusted too long to an excellent formula. Excellent as it is, it cannot function by itself; it needs the animating fire of a purely personal force. Fortunately this is forthcoming in a few instances.

Emile Menard has it, in his "Women Bathing in the Grove." In composition and in his conception of the nude he is a typical Salonnier, but he has a trace of poetic imagination and invests his graceful landscape with a delicate Virgilian quality. Henri Le Sidaner, though a rather mannered painter, has a kindred tendency to add a sensitive, subjective touch to his version of nature. He has beguiling color, too, delightfully enriching his faintly original schemes. Henri Lebasque, who portrays a young woman seated on a bench in a strong light in "The Banks of the Seine," is a good type of the French artist who has profited by going into the open air. He vitalizes thereby the familiar workmanship of his period, raising it to a higher value. Without forsaking a studio light Gustav Jaulmes nevertheless achieves a similar advance upon convention in his "Choosing a Necklace," a large interior with a reclining figure. His quiet color discloses a new note. He is one of the few who come forward with an accent of freshness, of vigorous talent, upon their art. Jean Lemordant is another, the young soldier who visited us a year or two ago and exhibited the paintings he had executed before he was swept into the war and suffered terrible disablement. He is represented by "The Dance," the study for a ceiling in the theater at Rennes which was conspicuous in his New York show. It is a brilliant performance, truly decorative, glowing in color, and, above all, spirited in execution. It is conspicuous once more, and this time in its revelation of the trait which too many of Lemordant's compatriots lack. French art as it is presented at Pittsburgh seems somehow crystallized, jaded. The luckier men, like Jaulmes, or Charlot, or divers others who might be cited, give a modest fillip to the prevailing temper. It is, when all is said, distinctly modest. It is not enough to prove that Besnard, for all his colleagues and disciples in craftsmanship, has any successor on the creative side of art.

English Art

Its Kinship With the French in Its Technical Drift

In the English section, as in the French, there is a single picture which sets one to thinking about the character of a school. It is a canvas with a portentous title, "Sowing the Seeds of the Irish Free State." Sir William Orpen painted it. Merely to state that fact is to indicate an affirmation of what is most significant in British art at the moment. Orpen is one of the outstanding types of his time, as admired a leader as Augustus John. There is something in this picture to explain why. The nude young woman dominating the design is capitally drawn. So is the charming colleen on the right. So is the lugubrious gentleman beside her. But that is all. As an excursion into allegory the painting completely fails to carry conviction. There is nothing imaginative about it. It is merely a strange sort of poster. In its want of glamour it is characteristic. There are several other canvases here which have an imaginative aim. There are religious compositions by Maurice Grieffenhagen and Robert Anning Bell; there is a picture of Noah and his family by Mr. Leon Underwood, "After the Flood," an essay in the manner of the Italian Primitives which is not without merit. But these things seem the works of illustrators rather than painters and to be compositions put together by main strength rather than out of genuine imaginative fervor. The only encouraging instances of effort in the same world are those which confine themselves to a strictly decorative purpose. Mr. E. R. Frampton is mildly successful in "The Kiss of Spring." Mr. Charles Sims is altogether captivating in his "Wedgwood," a study of two nude young women playing with a child on the beach. Mr. Sims gets a good pattern out of his figures. If he draws his forms a little conventionally he at all events draws them also with ability.

There we have the key to the whole British contingent. From Orpen to Sims and all through the rank and file the thing that is salient is not imagination, not creative energy, not personal interest, but sound draftsmanship, an admirable standard of technique. The situation is not unlike that in the French section. Yet there is a distinction to be noted. Hardly anybody among the Frenchmen transcends the Salon. More frequently, among the Englishmen, is the Royal Academy transcended. Lavery and Shannon, to be sure, proficient as they are in light, lively brushwork, are at bottom types certain to be at home in Burlington House. But there is a fair quantity of work that recalls the later movements in English art. William Nicholson makes a good contribution to it in his portrait, "William H. Davies." The portraiture often has this air of technique strengthened by a modicum of personality. The well drawn heads by Ernest Proctor and Harold Harvey, the portraits by Thomas Dugdale, Walter Russell and Glyn Philpot, all assert themselves as work of more than average merit. They may not be vastly above the average. There is no sign of great painting about them. But these painters know their trade. That the school generally knows it, with less reliance upon routine than is typical of Paris, is one of the most interesting phenomena to be noted in the British section.

The English, too, have their Besnard. They have him in Frank Brangwyn, whose "Susannah and the Elders" is both as regards color and form the chief exhibit on the walls. Brangwyn's personal quality is beyond cavil. He is a first class man, having something of his own to say and saying it with power. But he is isolated. He does not, like Besnard, represent a school. One more point suggests itself for comment where the British are concerned. The sensitive, imaginative touch which is missing from the figure pieces is clearly visible among the landscapes. There are beautiful outdoor studies by R. A. M. Stevenson, J. W. Morrice, E. A. Walton, Philip Connard and Richard Jack. These painters have light, air, color and, besides, personal outlooks and traces of emotion. The most memorable canvas in the whole show, apart from Brangwyn's picture, is not Orpen's allegorical excursion, but a landscape, "Windmill Hill," by Oliver Hall. It has the weight and—almost—the richness of a Jacob Maris.

American Art

Its Richness in Vigor and in Good Taste

We are expressing no patriotic prejudice in saying that the American section rather overshadows its neighbors. A distinguished Englishman or Frenchman would be compelled to admit that our school is the most progressive of the three. It is weak as the others are weak, in imaginative design. There are few contributors of pictures removed in subject from the everyday prose of life. But those few, as it happens, have value. We feel the sense of beauty operating in a really charming manner in Dewing's "Dance" and in Brush's "Modern Madonna." Its gracious effect is visible again in the somewhat confusing but still impressive picture of "The Expulsion," by Mr. E. F. Savage. Though this painter has devised too artificial a background for his figures, the latter are conceived with originality and are beautifully drawn. Mr. Blashfield is heroically monumental in his "Angel With the Flaming Sword." Decidedly these episodes have a serious interest. It is possible, also, to set against the brilliantly academic treatment of the nude in "A Model," by Mr. Leopold Seyffert, the even more brilliant individuality of Mr. Arthur B. Davies in his "Nevada." Still, it is in manual dexterity that the American exhibition is richest—in manual dexterity doubled with a freshness, a vigor, giving this section a tremendous advantage over the British or the French.

It would be hard to match in either of the foreign groups the painterlike swing and exhilaration of that "Easter Sunday," by Gari Melchers, which we have seen before in New York and elsewhere and which loses nothing of its appeal on any renewed scrutiny. Doubtless the artist learned his craft in Paris. But he has kept his native ardor of attack. This is the quality that runs through the American section and makes it a matter of pleasure and pride to an American observer. It spells truth and it spells force. Occasionally it is accompanied by something more. We note the spiritual element in a big canvas like Mr. C. W. Hawthorne's "American Motherhood," the exquisite refinement in a portrait like Miss Helen Turner's "Morning," the sheer loveliness extorted from still life by Mr. F. W. Benson in his "Blue and Gold." But it is just the unspoilt energy abounding everywhere and constantly supported by sparkling cleverness and adroitness that gives the show its tone. If this ebullient vivacity is at all discounted in interest, it is by the artists' choice of subject. They are not generally inclined to pay the tribute to mere humanity that is paid by Mr. Bellows in his powerful prize picture, the portrait of a child seated between two old women, "Eleanor, Jean and Anna." The tenderness of Mr. Brush, Mr. Hawthorne and one or two others is rare. American figure painting stays in terrible thralldom to the pretty girl. But with what inspiriting adroitness is she painted! There are quantities and quantities of clever paintings here that we owe to Richard Miller, Frederick Frieseke, Leon Kroll, Malcolm Parcell, Irving R. Wiles, John Carroll, Maurice Fromkes, Arthur Crisp, Gertrude Fiske and Robert Henri. It hardly matters that they are superficial affairs. Their surfaces are at least gay and vitalized. We breathe lively airs in their company. We escape from the deadening atmosphere of routine. And among the many landscapes, as always, we receive from men like Charles H. Davis, Willard Metcalf, Bruce Crane, Van Perrine, Henry B. Snell and a veritable little host of others enkindling flashes of the poetry and beauty of Nature.

It is our energy that places us in the van, and with it good workmanship and good taste. The creative impulse is evidently weak here as it is abroad. The times, mayhap, are out of joint. Genius comes but seldom to the front. But it is a great thing, while we are waiting for it, to be tingling with life. That is the gist of the report offered in the Pittsburgh International. The American school surges into the foreground there, and it does so because it is playing the game according to the immemorial rules and playing it with zest. Some of our best men are absent. But so are a good many of our mediocrities. It is a fairly representative collection and it represents health.

The Banks of the Seine

(From the painting by Henri Lebasque in the Pittsburgh International)

Random Impressions In Current Exhibitions

A collection of paintings by American artists has been placed on view at the Montross gallery. It will remain there through the rest of the month. At the Babcock gallery there is an exhibition of pastels by Henry Davenport.

To-morrow evening, at the Newark Museum, where an exhibition of German applied art is being held, there will be a discussion of the need for an industrial art museum. Dr. James P. Haney, Mr. John Sloan, Mr. Trygve Hammer, Mr. Chester R. Hoag and Mr. John Cotton Dana will speak. Thereafter, every Tuesday evening and Saturday morning as long as the show lasts, there will be similar talks at the Newark institution.

Recent paintings by Mr. Salvatore Guarino, an Italian artist who makes his home in New York, are on exhibition at the Kraushaar gallery. He has been revisiting his native land, and these pictures are studies of scenes in Rome and its environs, with one or two decorative portraits added to the group. They are vigorous impressions of picturesque architecture, bold in color. Their unquestionable spontaneity is a little muffled by the heaviness of Mr. Guarino's impasto. Evidently he uses the palette knife as much as the brush. It is effective, in a way, like the utterances of a man speaking at the top of his voice. Also it is somewhat brutal. The most attractive of the paintings are three or four studies of the historic Roman villas, notably "The Meeting," painted at Frascati. In these impressions of bosky green, seen under night light, the artist expresses an alluring romanticism in a fairly persuasive key.

The anniversary exhibition of Shelley memorabilia at the Grolier Club continues until May 20 and is open daily to the public. It consists of autograph letters and manuscripts and rare editions of the poet's works, including several things published in his youth.

Summer furniture designed by and made by Morgan Colt, of New Hope, forms part of the interesting exhibition of wrought-iron and other furniture and objects of artistic interest now assembled at the Arden gallery. Mr. Colt has several specimens of porch sets, consisting of chairs, bench and table with ingeniously fashioned supports, the table tops and chair seats in copper being covered with designs of various artistic motives. As an added display there is a quaint collection of embroidered caps and bonnets made by the women of various European countries, and assembled by Mme. L. E. Rigaud, of Paris. The small and beautifully ornate embroidered and brocaded christening caps reveal extreme delicacy and charm of design.

A sale at the American Art Galleries next Wednesday and Thursday evenings will disperse the print collection formed by the late John B. Pearse, of Roxbury, Mass. The catalogue runs to 500 numbers, covering old and modern masters. Rembrandt, Durer, Haden and Meryon are among those represented. Besides the woodcuts, etchings, engravings and color prints there are a number of drawings and water colors. Mr. Pearse's books on art are also to be sold. These, with items from other libraries, will be sold on Tuesday afternoon and evening and on Wednesday afternoon.

There is a memorial exhibition at the Century Club of the paintings of the late William T. Smedley. It includes none of the illustrative work or the water colors which first brought him into view years ago, and this is natural enough. He got into his stride as a portrait painter. In that role he did work of unusual merit. Save for one or two occasions, when he posed his sitters out of doors, he painted in a quiet key. Dark tones prevail in practically all his portraits. Color, as color, seems not to have greatly interested him. He concentrated on composition and construction. His figures are always felicitously placed upon the canvas, and they are drawn with fluent accuracy. The heads are well modeled. The hands are delicately defined. Smedley was a good interpreter of character. His portraits have vivid life. We are struck by the success with which a number of them, familiar in old exhibitions, have stood the passage of time. They were always admirable, and they seem now, if anything, better than when we saw them first. Their simple tonality has been tempered by the years. It is well knit. What particularly causes these portraits to wear so well is their dignity. Smedley had a fine, serene, highbred way of delineating his subjects.

The tenth annual exhibition of the National Association of Portrait Painters has been opened at the Knoedler gallery, bringing forward a collection of about thirty pieces. The sculptors account for only three or four of these, but they contribute heavily to the show. Mr. Fraser's bust, the "Primavera" of Mr. Herbert Adams, and the romantic "Meditation" by Mr. Aitken, are works of beauty. In that they expose, by contrast, the weakness of many of the painted portraits. These have the attributes of sympathetic characterization and facile, accomplished workmanship. They rarely have any charm. Mr. Sargent, for example, excites admiration for the familiar virtuosity in his "Mrs. Swinton," but the huge canvas is sadly empty of everything save dashing technique. There are capable pieces of work by Charles Hopkinson, Oliver D. Grover, John C. Johansen and Victor Hecht. There are some pleasantly decorative portraits by M. Jean McLane and Richard Miller. But there are only two paintings which possess an individual beguilement. These are the beautifully drawn "Edmond Wheelwright" by Lilian Westcott Hale and the superb "Man in Blue" by George Luks. This latter is a stirring tour de force, modern in essence, but of the tradition of Hale in its swift directness.

Under the Willows

(From the painting by Besnard in the Pittsburgh International)

Sowing the Seed of the Irish Free State

(From the painting by Sir William Orpen in the Pittsburgh International)

The Wanamaker gallery is filled with a large collection of black and white drawings by American artists, illustrative of many ideas and influences. The object, according to those in charge, is to steer clear of making a clique exhibition of it. Certainly the recent shows there have been exclusive. And here even the doors are not open wide enough to cause appreciable change in the atmosphere within. To offset a little the prevailing futurist tone such sensitive and convincing things are shown as Speicher's nudes, Sterne's figures, Rockwell Kent's interesting pen allegories, John Held jr.'s subtle woodcut satires and Corley's and Chandler's fanciful decorative black and whites. There is a very interesting South American fantasy by the Japanese, Yamanoughi, while the morbid sketch of the execution of Landru by Edmund Duffy has obvious merit in drawing, observation and construction. There are other good things, on the whole less important ones, though Reginald Marsh's "Hairy Ape" is interesting as a study in form, if greatly overdrawn.

A special collection of pictorial photography from Canada is being shown by the Toronto Camera Club at the invitation of the Camera Club of New York at the latter's quarters, 21 West Sixty-eighth Street, until the close of the month. All interested in outdoor photography are invited.

At the Kennedy gallery there are exhibitions of dry points of the seaside by Sears Gallagher and old English sporting prints picturing in colors such subjects as shooting, hunting, fishing and coaching. Mr. Gallagher does remarkably well the glaring atmosphere of the summer beach in appropriately sparing contrasts. The reflection of the sun, the silvery sheen it casts over the distant blue of the ocean, the lightly suggested outlines as of white-clad figures, indistinct against the sand, is all deftly observed. The heavy seas breaking over the rocks in "Maine Coast" give a sense of inherent power without resorting to strong contrast or displays of technique. He is always simple in method and more positive for that. "Sand Dune" is a print of extreme subtlety and good drawing involving an appealing observation of childhood. Two notable sporting prints shown here also are Wolstenholme's pair of hunt pictures engraved by Sutherland. There is a beautiful series of fishing prints of unusual mellowness of color.

There is opened to-day at the Anderson Galleries an exhibition of works of art from the estates of the late George H. Hart, the late Cornelia G. W. Hall and others. They include paintings, sculptures, furniture and other objects. The sale takes place next Thursday and Friday afternoons.

Gus Mager has stepped from the very prosaic and limiting confines of the printed page to do an art that knows no bounds. Which is to say that his oil paintings, water colors and drawings at the Brummer gallery are entirely unhampered by tradition or convention. He sees and works freely and quite as vaguely as do many of the moderns with whom he is allied. For one thing his landscapes are badly confused and turgid in color. Possibly the "Old Tree" is an earlier work. At least, it shows a better sense for color and is nicely composed. A couple of flower pieces make also ensembles of brighter and more pleasing tones. A dog study is good, though devoid of anything like formfulness. There seems a forced clumsiness about some of the figure pieces, notably of a girl sewing, while in the self-portrait there is a wavering back toward truth. The water colors of foreign scenes are spontaneous and well drawn.

George Biddle is making a good display of his talent as a woodcut artist at the Weyhe gallery. The strength of character with which he endows heads of South Sea types is carried somewhat into his studies of nude form in lithograph. But here he is more experimental, more inclined toward the grotesque and considerably less sincere. One fine exception is the heavily shaded nude of somewhat larger proportions. They are striking prints that he shows on silver and gold colored paper. Zorach, Max Weber and Valotton are other exhibitors.

An exposition of Portuguese art and industries is being held under the auspices of the Republic of Portugal at the galleries at 634 Fifth Avenue. Julio Pina and Eurico Lima de Magalhaes are responsible for the extensive collections, and an invitation to attend is extended by them to the public.

About seventy-five painters have given canvases to the "Little Art Gallery" of the Street Fair, which will be held this week in Park Avenue as a benefit for the Association for the Aid of Crippled Children. The pictures will be auctioned to highest bidders. An exhibition under the direction of Mrs. Walter Sullivan, chairman of the art committee, was held last week at the home of Mrs. Swen A. Swenson in Madison Avenue. The advisory committee consists of Charles C. Curran, Grosvenor Atterbury, D. C. French and E. H. Blashfield.

The "Playtime Exhibition" of the Society of Illustrators was opened on Thursday at the Art Center. This constitutes paintings, drawings and other examples of art done by the members during off hours and when motivated by the impulse to see what they can do out of the usual line of endeavor. The leading illustrators, including Gibson, Keller, Penfield, Grant, Williams and Wilson, have sent contributions.

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