

Views and Reviews in the World of Art



"Madonna and Child," Donatello; Bardini collection, American Art Association.

widest success are No. 3, a gentleman who sits musing over a book, and No. 12, a portrait of a lady whose gown gives the picture a scheme of black, purple and turquoise. They are simpler than some of the other portraits, in which technical problems are too much in evidence.

In one or two of the doubtless earlier works the suspicion forces itself upon one that the artist was afraid of bothering her sitters too much and painted them in the first pose they took. I have heard of some painters who purposely begin a false portrait just to get a little acquainted with the sitter, and decide upon the eventual pose when the sitter is off his guard during the period of rest.

Certain of the "Sailor" portraits are not open to this criticism and are not at all conventional. The "Navy Clubhouse" is a transcript from a present day patriotic service that will have its value later on when the war is a thing to be merely talked about.

With the pictures a garden figure in bronze by Miss Marjorie Curtis is shown, a crouching female figure holding aloft a basket of fruit. It is a graceful garden ornament and well modelled.

Literalness in Art Frowned Upon

The following sermon, which is intended for those who insist upon putting literal interpretations upon works of art, appeared in the *Bulletin* of the Art Institute of Chicago. There is a little notice upon the *Bulletin* from the Postmaster-General saying that a one cent stamp affixed to the *Bulletin* when the reader is done with it will send it, without wrapper or address, to some sailor or soldier at the front. A double service might be rendered by sending it first to some academical friend with the request to forward it when read to the front. Literalness is a thing that must be fought all along the art line.

"What is the meaning of the poster of the Chicago Artists' recent exhibition—the poster of the lion and the rose?" The question was asked many times, and it is a typical question. Nearly every day some one asks, "What is the meaning of Barnard's group, 'The Two Natures'?" Which is the better nature and which the evil nature?" or, in the case of Miss Walker's "Her Son," "Is this a representation of Mary and the young Christ, or is it not?"

A New England school teacher wrote to Henri Lerolle in France, in behalf of her class, to know what hour of the day was to be understood in his painting, "The Shepherdess," and Lerolle replied by an early mail, earnestly and simply, "Look at the picture." This is in principle the answer to all these questions. Perhaps the most characteristic purpose served by art

in human life is that of stimulating the imagination. The first stage of this imaginative activity usually seems to take the form of a more or less delicate curiosity—what the poet might have called "a sweet unrest." Now, if we insist on having this curiosity explained away for us the moment it makes itself felt, are we not nipping our whole imaginative experience in the bud? Are we not, in other words, completely missing the point for which the picture was painted, just at the moment when we expected to grasp it?

For it is, the unrolling of the imagination's scroll and not what is written upon it that gives us our real enjoyment of art works. Is it not the telling which makes a tale? We know that we can learn "how things were settled" by seeing the fifth act of the play, but do we not like to see the other four acts (which are there to stimulate the "sweet unrest") as well? What is written on the scroll marks our objective, but in itself it is stored and congealed; while the unrolling of the scroll is an adventure with a living mind, which leaps from pinnacle to pinnacle of flaming experience.

Why our attitude toward the spatial arts in this respect should have become so different from that toward literature is difficult to tell. Perhaps it is due, as suggested above, to our lack of patience with the imaginative process. Possibly too we distrust our own power of deduction from the facts the artist has given us. More likely still it is that, since the invention of printing, we have received so large a part of our knowledge through the type page that we can think of the spatial arts only as illustrations, on a more or less grand scale, to ideas which first of all exist in terms of words and which the artist then translates into terms of form and color as best he can. No assumption could be further from the truth. In probably nine cases out of ten, the title of his picture is the last thing the painter thinks of, and some painters change the titles of their works as they go from one exhibition to another. Whistler's titles were often skilfully contrived to throw the mind back to the true problem—"Symphony in flesh color and green," "Nocturne in blue and silver," &c. It is said that, in the case of the Barnard group referred to above, when the work was finished a literary friend of the sculptor inquired as to its title. The sculptor, not having given this a thought, permitted this man to supply the caption which the work bears. It seems unlikely that the sculptor realized the public's tendency to attach more importance to the title than to the work itself, for it is clear that in this case he has permitted an individual who had no part in the conception or evolution of the work forever to limit its interpretation to a well worn platitude. What large thoughts might

these two mystic figures, linked in perpetual struggle, neither a permanent victor, have suggested to more adventurous minds!

Let us study another aspect of the literary formulation of a work of art. In our poster the lion represents strength, the rose beauty. The poster shows strength (the organization of the exhibition) bringing beauty to the Art Institute. This is a typical "official" explanation. It is not to be denied that such an explanation gives us solid satisfaction. We check over the poster and find, indeed, all the parts present as enumerated. We have satisfied our curiosity at one fell blow. There is a sense of rest in the consciousness of having something "settled." But is all this the rare ministration which a work of art really may be expected to bring to the human spirit? Have we not, indeed, permitted ourselves to be hoodwinked out of the perception of the poster's real significance by this formula which appears so transparent and innocent? Does it give, after all, the whimsical spirit which is so appealing in the poster itself? Does it even give the facts?

In the first place, the exhibition was not collected by force. Quite the contrary. The use of the lion then is far-fetched. Secondly, if he is bringing beauty to the Art Institute, why is he sitting on his haunches with his back to his destination? In which version is truth to be found, in the painted picture which existed first or in the literary formula? Has the poster any meaning, after all? Let us attempt to construct one out of the materials in hand—an "unofficial" meaning, the result of our own "imaginative unrest."

First of all, the lion is a friendly fellow. He almost smiles. In our anxiety to get out of his way we had not observed this. He is familiar. In fact he is a landmark. He is part of the institute itself. He has just stepped down from his pedestal and seated himself in our midst. And as a token of good will, he has brought a characteristic offering—a symbol of beauty. He is, in short, the familiar emissary of the Art Institute laying at the feet of Chicago the art of the year!

It is interesting to know that Mr. Babcock, the designer of the poster, first made the interpretation given above as the "official" one, and that he subsequently changed it to the second one given. The latter, though proposed by some one else, seemed to the artist more nearly to convey his own idea. Is it conceivable that he would so lightly have changed one element in his well thought out composition or one single note of his fine color scheme?

And the poster still is full of meanings. Possibly the artist has satirized this very theme of literary interpretation of art works. May not the gentle beast in the poster be, after all, simply the well intentioned literary lion who brings us the painter's subtle message torn and ruined in his teeth?

Prizes have just been awarded by the Art Alliance of America for the best labels to be used to identify bolts of cloth in the South and Central American export trade. The awards are as follows: First prize of \$100 offered by William G. Broadway was awarded to Archie Gunn for "A Spanish Dancer." Of the second and third prizes, both offered by the Arthur C. Harris Company, \$50, was awarded to Rolf Stoll for "A Lady with a Tambourine," and \$25 to Helen K. Bromm for the "Red Shawl."

The purpose of these labels is to establish in foreign markets brands which shall be as well known as "Fruit of the Loom" and other staples are on our markets. In the Southern countries many of the people can neither read nor write and the picture on the label is their only guide in selecting goods and in reordering them when they have given satisfaction.

The exhibition of container and labels, which will be on free exhibition in the Art Alliance Galleries at 10 East Forty-seventh

street until April 30, has attracted much interest in the trades. It has brought out the importance of good color and design in such practical ways as the package of crackers, the bottles in which perfumery is put up and containers of other articles in every day use. One case holds very attractive French containers, chiefly perfumery bottles and other outer wrappings, while another case is filled with attractive packages sold for only a few cents in Chinatown.

Notes and Activities in World of Art

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