AMERICAN ART SCORES A TRIUMPH AT THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF PAINTING AT PITTSBURGH: BY GILES EDGERTON

In exhibition of painting is not important so much for the display of any definite number of technically excellent or sentimentally interesting pictures, but for certain tendencies shown, of growth suggested, or the relation of the quality of an art to its own nation or to other nations. In other words, the value to us here in America of a big international picture show lies largely in the opportunity it gives us to classify the various modern schools of painting and to catalogue them for our own understanding and enjoyment. For to thinking people a painting is not merely a source of pleasure; it is rather a means of wider culture, an opportunity to establish standards and a chance to contrast art conditions of different lands and thus better to form a cultivated critical judgment toward our own progress.

That there has been progress, a very remarkable progress within the last few years, is unquestioned. Above all things we have grown courageous about our art. We no longer, at least all of us do not, wait for foreign approval. We dare to proclaim a man an artist (an' he deserves the name) even if he has never crossed the Atlantic nor studied at Julien's nor starved in the Latin Quarter. We have even gone further than this. Our artists have commenced to study American conditions and scenery and have recklessly proclaimed them picturesque. From Broadway, New York, to the enchanted mesa in Hopi Land subjects have been discovered worthy of American canvases. And because of this assertion of independence, coupled with the development of great gift, our artists have come to be reckoned with in the Munich and Paris ateliers, and even in London the names of Sargent and Whistler and Chase are known. It is not unnatural that Europe should resent a little the fact that America has ceased, or is beginning to cease, her ardent occupation of copying the works of their great men. It was pleasant to let us roam about
their galleries and grant us the privilege of humbly and apologetically imitating their work, and to offer us kindly patronage. But now that we have discovered our own personality and decided—some of us—to express our national temperament in the works of our imagination, we are no longer candidates for a few kind words and a pat on the head. We have to be considered seriously and criticism must be awarded us according to our merits. For a while, at least, this stand will not meet with approval,—it will seem self-assertive and self-conscious—but in the long run we will take our place in the foreign galleries, and the indications are at present that it will be a very high place.

The value of an international exhibit is thus to us no longer that we might estimate how well we succeed with Munich technique, how conscientiously we adhere to French and Dutch subjects, or how steadily we avoid the distinctly creative expression of an American quality; we have gone beyond all this at last, and today we speak of a national art without a mortified sense of provincialism. And also we are beginning to think of an America in the future possessing an architecture that has grown out of the life of the people, a literature that is unconsciously history, not only of our times but our temperament; an art which both in technique and subject has developed out of our own conditions. For a man who is at once creative yet vividly alive to all actually existing conditions (which is typical of the American artist) paints not only what he sees but how he sees it, and technique with such a man is nothing more than his effort to make you clearly understand exactly how he sees life.

Little by little we find that American painting, the best of it, is growing typical of American conditions. The qualities which are temperamental to us as a race are becoming significant in our art,—an art which is not only descriptive of our ways of living but what we think of them. Possibly the two most dominant qualities in our painting, for as yet our other arts have not advanced sufficiently to be radically expressive, are a sense of humor and a very sincere love of nature. This sense of humor is particularly noticeable in all our sculpture and in the outdoor painting of city scenes. It is not caricature or anything related to that very obvious thing known as a joke, but it is the true sense of humor which is at once tender, kind, amusing and even pathetic. It is the quality which seems to bind all other good qualities together with a smile. Our very genuine love of nature and understanding of all her rare moods is speedily ranking our landscape men as among the greatest the world has seen; today possibly
"INDUSTRIAL CENTER—SNOW-COVERED ROOFS"; BY ALBERT BAERTSOEN.
“HARU-NO-YUKI—SNOW IN SPRING”: BY ALFRED EAST.
"IN A VARIETY THEATER"
BY ARTHUR KAMPF.
SOME FAMOUS FOREIGN MODERN ARTISTS WHO EXHIBITED AT PITTSBURGH

ALBERT HAERTSOEN: BELGIUM.

ALFRED EAST: ENGLAND.

BIPPE CIRADY: ITALY.

ARTHUR KAMPF: GERMANY.

CHARLES COTTET: FRANCE.
AMERICAN ART TRIUMPHS AT PITTSBURGH

the greatest, if one can judge from the national and international exhibits of the last year of two.

Thus we are sufficiently advanced to gain the full benefit of such a presentation of the world’s modern art as the Twelfth Annual Exhibition of Oil Paintings at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, where modern paintings of practically all European nations were hung in contrast with the paintings of some of our best American artists. Unfortunately, the best work of our best artists was not inevitably hung; but this probably held equally true of the foreign exhibitors, so that it seems fair to make a critical comparison of the work shown, contrasting modern American art frankly with canvases from Germany, France, Italy, Scandinavia, Spain and even Russia. Many who have visited this most important international exhibit have already had a wide opportunity of comparing American and foreign art in the galleries of different nations. And this is unquestionably a most valuable method of forming opinions and of estimating the quality of different national art. Yet, on the other hand, the bringing together in one building of pictures from all over the world, as was done at Pittsburgh, is by far the most practicable and reasonable method of cultivating a finer critical faculty and of forming well defined valuable judgment on the question of the relative value of modern art in all that vague, boundless land known as the art world.

Of the pictures shown at the Carnegie Institute at least one-third of the three hundred and forty-two were foreign, the work of important men who rank among the great at the continental galleries. Monet, Le Sidaner, John Lavery, Zampf, Cottet, László, Villegas, Mancini are men well known in Paris and in Munich; not as Millet is, to be sure, or Cazin, or Puvis de Chauvannes; but, on the other hand, we are not exhibiting Whistler or Sargent—the balance is there, however, for we were showing John Twachtman, Winslow Homer, Irving Wiles, William Chase, Robert Henri, Cecelia Beaux, Willard Metcalf, Elmer Schofield, J. Francis Murphy, and Horatio Walker, whom America may claim, if not the United States.

After a most careful comparative study of the paintings from Europe, north and south, from America, east and west, the impression is inescapable that America, considered in all the various expressions in art, in this exhibit at least, is the winner. It seems true not only of the landscapes but of portraits, of sea pictures and of interiors. Perhaps one should discriminate here and say of the home
interiors, for the French cabaret and studio scenes are unquestionably more brilliant, more splashingly effective than anything along this line done by American artists. I am not sure that so sweeping a tribute as the foregoing could ever have been honestly written before of an international exhibit. We have won out along single lines and various lines, from time to time, in contrast with other work, but I cannot recall that ever before would it have been possible to say that in a single exhibit at least some of our paintings suggested the greatest imagination, the subtlest poetry, the most direct methods, the freest technique, with almost invariably home-grown subjects. So much of this praise belongs to our younger men that a word to that effect is due them. Men like Lawson, Glackens, Sloan, Henri, Lathrop, Metcalf, have done such yeoman service in discovering America as a beautiful and profitable "subject" that their radicalism has done much necessary leavening of academic art in this country.

But there are other men who have made a significant showing at the exhibit, men of the generation who connect the elder Inness and Homer Martin with our younger men,—J. Francis Murphy, J. Alden Weir, Leonard Ochtmann, William T. Smedley, Bruce Crane. These men average strong on the line with the best that France has sent us, and have a quality of individuality of presentation which England seems wholly to have missed in this generation.

A PART from the fact that as a whole the American work seems to stand out préeminent in merit, the foreign work, separately and individually, suggests failure along wholly differing lines. The French work as a whole lacks the qualities which just now American art seems particularly to achieve,—those of poetry and intrinsic merit; in other words, sympathetic feeling and a real reason for painting a picture. The French painting, more often than not, has chic, sometimes even distinction, but the search for the great universal beauty, those hidden marvels of tone and grace which life holds perdu for all the artists true of heart, is not apparent. There is often the presentation of sprightly fancy, more often perhaps than in our own art, and there is a superficial gaiety, but one feels that there is but the symbol of gaiety, not real gladness or tenderness or even a big sadness, and rarely force, truth or vitality. These tremendous real issues of life do not seem to find expression in any of the more popular of well-known French canvases. Instead, we find strange decadent fancies, emotions of the purely boulevardier type. Strong feeling of many kinds, jealousy, rage, cruelty, sus-
"THE GRAND CANAL—MOONLIGHT":
BY HENRI EUGENE LE SIDANER.
"PORTRAIT OF YOUNG GIRL WITH AMBER NECKLACE": BY CHARLES COTTET.
Reproduced by permission of Carnegie Institute

“BIRD SONG” : BY LILLIAN MATHILDE GENTH.
Reproduced by courtesy of National Gallery, Washington.

“HIGH CLIFFS—COAST OF MAINE”:
BY WINSTOW HOMER.
picion, cunning,—these qualities lend color, individuality, tragedy
to modern continental art, especially to modern Parisian art. And
taken en masse, it is almost inevitably the impression received, how-
ever clever technically this art may be, that it is spiritless, soulless.
Why does it exist? is the first question. If it is a revelation of national
conditions it is tragic; if not, it is meaningless. Throughout France
the search in art, architecture, literature, seems to be essentially for
novelty—the “new art,” with its cornerstone of eccentricity. This
criticism does not hold good up in northern Europe. Scandinavia
is thinking and dreaming; she is desperately introspective, perhaps
even morbid at times, but as a poet would be, fearlessly, frankly,
with eyes that see clear from hilltops. And great new art cannot be
born, as Paris has thought, in a studio; it must spring up somewhere
out of doors and remote, in the Barbizon fields or in Connecticut
meadows, or, at worst, from the vision of these things seen by great
souls in sordid quarters where memory and homesickness cover
canvases.

The English pictures at the exhibit in the main carried too much
paint, as though done slowly, without inspiration, seeking effects
from endless effort and tubes of color. The few examples of modern
Spanish and Italian art seemed definitely imitative of Paris; yet
as the South is more picturesque this sort of painting from the south-
ern artists seemed more sincere. It was nearer life, with less whim-
sical novelty and inventive degeneracy. The technique seemed
forced, as that sort of imitative work must, but the purpose rational.
Belgium does not seem as yet to have definitely found herself in art;
in music, yes; in literature, somewhat. But in the main she has
been too divided a nationality with her Dutch instincts and her
French ways to accomplish aught beyond a strange hybrid of thrift
and emotion, which up to the present has only achieved good govern-
ment and interesting music.

But to return to America. It has been difficult, at least for the
writer, to understand why the first prize at an exhibit of such pro-
portion should have gone to a little interior called “The Necklace,”
by Thomas W. Dewing. A charming interior, done with Dewing’s
inimitable subtlety of expression and extraordinarily interesting
technique, but where there were in the exhibit expressions of at least
some of the greatest achievement in American art, it is confusing to
the writer, as it must be to these same artists, to understand the mean-
ing of this sort of discrimination. The giving of the second prize
to Le Sidaner’s “Grand Canal—Moonlight,” seemed a more reason-
able expression of appreciation and understanding, for although less remarkable than some pictures which were not prize winners, it nevertheless has rare charm of poetry and color. This picture has since been purchased by the Carnegie Institute for its permanent exhibit. “Bird Song,” by Lillian M. Genth, was also among the purchases made from this exhibit.

The most interesting showing of one man’s work at this annual exhibit was a collection of twenty-two paintings of Winslow Homer, eight of which were loaned from important American museums. In speaking of this collection, one of the art critics wrote: “In his originality Winslow Homer is as complete as if he were the sole occupant of this planet. The splendor and amplitude of nature—not the skill of the painter—are the first and the last things to affect the mind as one looks at his pictures. ‘I count him a great man,’ says Emerson, ‘who inhabits a higher sphere of thought, into which other men rise with labor and difficulty; he has but to open his eyes to see things in a true light and in large relations.’ And again—as if he were actually thinking of Winslow Homer—‘he is great who is what he is from nature, and who never reminds us of others.’ Great men are thus somewhat separate and isolated. Winslow Homer’s feeling for wild, primitive nature and the life of the solitary dwellers in the wilderness is equally pronounced, and his originality is manifested in quite as distinctive ways in the delineation of the mountains and the woods of our vast inland domains. Everywhere our American hearts respond joyfully to the broad, hearty, manly and straightforward American style of his work, and the intimate and purely national touch with which he clothes all his conceptions.


A memory of the exhibit as a whole emphasizes the impression that American landscape work has struck a note of beauty, individuality and sincerity that places it unquestionably in the position of the best work of its kind that is being done in modern art.