AMERICAN PAINTERS OF OUTDOORS: THEIR RANK AND THEIR SUCCESS: BY GILES EDGERTON

Here is a most extraordinary variety of national characteristics revealed in the art of a country when that art is spontaneous—or when it is not, for that matter; for when art is not spontaneous a nation is root-bound somewhere, and the proof of it is found in every genuine expression which the nation makes.

No more cruel criticism of the development of a country can be made than that the various expressions of art are imitative, for imitation is only the intuitive response to beauty of the unthinking; not the ignorant, by any means, but the unthinking. While creative art may be born out of the so-called most ignorant soul, imitation takes deepest root in the ultra-cultured. A very simple people, like the Hopi Indians, for instance, may think profoundly and philosophically about the conditions of life, the relation of facts to fancy, the need for a soul’s development, with response to that need born of imagination—and such people, living in the most primitive fashion, without knowledge or relation to the conditions of modern civilization, nevertheless create art—religion, poetry, music. On the other hand, the extremely cultured, dilettante community has more often than not so overburdened the receptive capacity of the brain that the pressure kills all creative quality, leaving instead appreciation and a desire to imitate or to possess the beauty which others have created.

Here in America, up to within a few decades past, we have found the creative quality flourishing only among our aboriginal people—our Indians, and those other simple people (who because of slavery have held to aboriginal traits), the Southern negro; while the heterogeneous combination of all the peoples of the rest of the world which we have amalgamated into an American has been mainly imitative in art expression, in all the uses of imagination except along scientific and financial lines; for both invention and successful business require imagination, but of the mathematical kind, which, while stimulating activity, does not look to beauty as the result and purpose of achievement. Of that art which is born of the inspired mind for the permanent joy of the world we have but slowly gained the freedom of mind and technique to create. And what we have achieved has apparently been in spite of the determination of the greater part of the nation to stultify all individual expression.

Charles Dudley Warner once spoke of “those people who were insulted by originality.” As a matter of fact, it is still true of the
mass of us. We like only what we are familiar with, the thing neatly labeled and bearing the union stamp of unthinking approval. When we are not insulted by a new creative spirit, we are frightened by it. We no sooner study into the question of antique rugs and learn all their lovely variation by heart when a rug wholly out of the reckoning comes down from the New Hampshire hills, a rug that is unticketed, without precedent, and we are asked to call it beautiful without a recipe. Then we turn our attention to the study of periods in furniture and become versatile with every variation from Louis to Louis. And we delve into the delightful subject of Oriental ceramics, and we no sooner think we know these cultured things when out of a clear sky, without reference to our pride in old formula, we find for our use in America a new furniture, simple and beautiful, made of American woods, adapted to American needs, and adding to our bewilderment is a most extraordinary variety of home-made pottery, modeled out of the very soil which bears the trees out of which has been made the furniture which has already troubled us, and we are asked to see and admire—more than that, to buy art products of which we know nothing, stamped with crests of which we have never heard, chairs without tradition, vases without history. Naturally, as a result we are overwhelmed, even annoyed. And many of us turn our faces back to the pleasant century-old friends who have come to us from the hills of Athens and from the byways of Rome, and later from the suburbs of Paris. We feel safer, somehow, when we recognize the labels again, and we get rid of that unpleasant suggestion of insulting originality.

Just as our pottery and furniture and sometimes our architecture are developing this thoughtless! heedless! suggestion of individuality, so in painting, sculpture, music we find that our bigger men consider less and less the fears of the public; we find a great musician going away to the heart of the White Mountains to evoke wondrous melodies for his phase of American art. We receive a rare inspired literature out of that arid region known as the Middle West. Paintings are coming to us full of the strange strength and extraordinary beauty of the Grand Canyon; others smaller but not more subtle are finding way into the metropolitan galleries from the ocean inlets of New England, and a sculpture of towering strength and splendid ruggedness has been achieved in the squalid towns of our Western prairies, while illustration that is as fearless in source of inspiration as it is brilliant in technique and honest in purpose is beginning to appear occasionally in our most courageous magazines. And thus we, the dilettante, cultured public, with our taste established, with our interest settled, with a speaking part about all the arts of all the different
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"A FACTORY VILLAGE":
J. ALDEN WEIR, PAINTER,
THE RAPIDS—SISTER ISLANDS—NIAGARA:
WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT, PAINTER.
Kindness of Macbeth Galleries.

"THE CLOUD" : WILLIAM SARTAIN, PAINTER.
nations, are called upon to renew our youth, to cut a pathway through
the underbrush of our tangled knowledge and make room for the
appreciation of fresh ideas, original achievement, for the actual beauty
of our own land, presented by the men who know it best, the American
artists.

HOW often we hear the phrase, “We have so little real art in
America; we are not temperamentally an artistic people.”
It is the same old story of bricks without straw; we will not let
our artists live and we complain that they do not achieve more. For
instance, how much wheat would we supply the markets of the world
if we never stopped to cut it? It could scarcely grow itself out into
the money changes of the universe. How many inventions would
we supply for mechanical progress if no one bothered to investigate,
to supply money to start factories for the manufacture of clever pat-
ents? The marvel is that we have any artists, that any imagination
has outlived the dullness, impertinence, non-understanding of our
artificial, imitative, superficially cultivated public. We have laughed
at our men of genius, those whom we have not previously destroyed
so far as possible in Europe. We have doubted the sincerity of the
greatest of them, we have supported fake foreign art while our own men
have all but starved, and we have babbled the while about the pau-
city of our art conditions. That our artists have survived, that our
art has grown in spite of the most impossible conditions ever established
by a nation for the breeding of beauty is a magnificent tribute to the
purpose and force of our native genius.

When the worst copy of Diaz or Daubigny would sell in New York
City for a price that would sound in a South Washington Square
studio like a life annuity, why should we expect men to have the
courage and the purpose to go away to New England, to Colorado,
to Long Island to paint only what they know and love and feel, just
for the sake of truth and the advancement of the best art conditions
of their own country? Or when the only music we truly love and are
willing to support is the jangle and tinkle of silly Italian opera, with
a high soprano note as a standard of excellence, how does a man find
the courage to steal away to the stillness of uncut woodland in order
to utter melodies born in his soul, out of his own marvelous imagi-
nation, which the public feared to love until he bought their approval
with death? A great price, it seems to those of us who have cared
for his melody, and yet one that some men willingly pay for the chance
of expressing in their own way the quality of their own understanding
of beauty.

And so we marvel, perhaps most of all at our landscape men in
America, who, in spite of complete lack of appreciation for years, without the faintest sympathy from the general public toward that fine sort of courage that holds genius to endeavor, in spite of rebuff and bitter misunderstanding, have somehow through it all created for America an outdoor art so fresh, so sincere, so intimate to the land to which it belongs that today our landscapes stand at the head of all the nature painting in the world. Neither France, Germany, England nor Spain, with the glory of her new art about her, rank with our own painters of all outdoor life, woods, hills, orchards, city streets, prairies, the Indian mesa and the skyscraper. There is not only great achievement in the work of such men as Twachtman, Weir, Tryon, Metcalf, Lathrop, Hassam, Murphy, Glackens, Lawson, Shinn, but there is also the invincible courage which belongs only to people of imagination, sensitive, alive to all beauty and all suffering. And yet this manifestation of art is as essentially American as we could well conceive such work to be. There is the same lyric quality in our greatest landscapes that there is in our most genuine poetry. We are not an epic nation; we are too easily successful, too prosperous. What of tragedy we have for present history of art is brought to us these days through the steerage by the emotional elements of foreign worn-out civilizations. And if in this roundabout way it finds place in our art, it but represents one phase of our confused conditions of existence. The more national quality, especially in painting and preeminently in the work of our landscape men, is this lyric note. We find it repeated over and over again and never too often; as witness the subjects most often presented, the hush of the woods, the still fragrance of early spring, the ghostly dory in a twilight sea, the hidden pool in the yellow woods, the mysterious radiance of prairie sunsets, the tender, brooding quality of the early snow that comes sometimes as a kindly wonderful garment of beauty, twilight about simple homes, isolated old farms with memories that bring quivering response. What do our men not know and what have they not told us of all that is characteristic of the rural life of America, which has been the birthplace of so much of our poetry and of our strength, of the humor and of the kindly tendency of our nation?

As for the technique of these men, there is no one definite school of American landscape painters. There are men of marked individuality who unquestionably have many followers, men like Hassam, Murphy, Metcalf, and among the illustrators there is Glackens, who undoubtedly deserves the fame of being the originator of our most sincere and significant school of modern illustrators. And there are both men and women who frankly acknowledge his work as the inspiration of their best achievements. But as a whole, there seems but little thought
WHO FOR HIMSELF

of establishing schools, of creating fame through any essential individuality. The impulse which dominates these men is much greater than this, much more sincere, much more valuable to a country. As a matter of fact, their purpose is so quietly and honestly to express just the best that is about them in the most beautiful way that they have been able to achieve, that I question if many of them think beyond their own work up to its value in the national art history of America.

WHO FOR HIMSELF?

WHO has labored for himself and who has labored for mankind?
Is it true that only hero and sage, poet and great ruler, have wrought for the masses?
Is it true that the masses have worked only for themselves, and not for each other?
Poet and sage, doubtless, have spoken well,
Hero and ruler have oftentimes lived nobly,
But there is a common man, working under good or ill conditions,
Hungry often, rearing children at sacrifice,
Fighting the fight in desperation, yet keeping faith,
Clean and simple, willing to share all with his neighbor,
And there is a common woman, a mother or a helper of mothers,
Or a lonely worker, foregoing sweet dreams for strong realities,
Knowing the tormenting fingers of travail and doubt,
And yielding never.—
Stanch and able, a fosterer of the future,
No creature of superficial smiles.
He and she, humble and unconscious,
These and their kind, by struggle and the spirit of victory,
Serve mankind, it may be, as well as any of the rest.
For, in the realities of life, are they not dumb poets?
Are they not quiescent sages and unpraised heroes?
Are they not, though unrecognized, the certain and final rulers?

MARGUERITE OGDEN BIGELOW.