THE NEED OF A NATIONAL ACADEMY, AND ITS VALUE TO THE GROWTH OF ART IN AMERICA; BY JOHN W. ALEXANDER, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY

All great movements progress through civilization by the aid of the institution. It is the means by which ideas are held back from the disintegrating forces of change, and to convince oneself of this it is only necessary to recall the fact that all permanent institutions are first born in some phase of reformation. This is as true of religion as of art; it is equally true of social conditions. The effort of the intelligent to conserve a progressive idea results in the upbuilding of the institution, which for the time being becomes the needed nursery of the idea.

Without doubt this nursery may in time become in a sense a restriction. The idea may take new form, craving new environment, or a different idea may spring up demanding fresh effort for its preservation, and become in turn a new revolution needing a new institution. And the fact that every phase of civilization is not the same, that each epoch demands its own materialization, producing its own colleges, academies and societies, proves only the more conclusively that however much the opportunity of achievement may vary, the essential of life is that there should be ever-widening opportunity; not one academy, but many, each in turn the symbol of new ideas and the guarantee of their preservation.

It is from this wider viewpoint that we should regard the existence of the National Academy, and its value to the progress of the art of America.

To those able to look back upon the distressingly dead conditions prevailing in this country only twenty years ago, the great awakening wave of interest now sweeping over the United States in regard to art matters seems little short of miraculous. At that period few, with the exception of those actively engaged in art as a profession, were interested either in native work or native workers, and a small band of devoted pioneers had not only to do without patrons, but were actually without the necessary means for recruiting their strength.
by the study of great examples by great masters. To secure artistic sustenance the would-be artists were driven abroad, and no doubt many a talented man who could not command the means for this expensive method of study must have perished slowly at home of mental starvation.

Within the short compass of a decade the whole aspect of affairs has changed. We have become genuinely convinced of the great educational value of the fine arts in their relation to the life of our people, and in every city and even in many of our smaller towns provision is made for exhibitions designed to foster the arts and encourage this conviction.

Beautiful and suitable buildings are springing up everywhere, erected and endowed in some instances by private benefactors and in others by appropriations from the State or municipality. It is extremely difficult now to discover a place of importance which has not its public gallery devoted to exhibitions of the allied arts. Unfortunately for the prestige of the most important city in our Union, New York has lagged far behind in this very vital work. It alone possesses no suitable quarters for the housing of current exhibitions, though we have amply provided for the education of our art students by the founding of schools.

The schools of the National Academy, the Art Students' League, the Cooper Union and hosts of private undertakings, together with the founding and endowing of the American Academy at Rome, combine to afford the student ample facilities to acquire the technique of his profession. In addition to these schools, prizes and scholarships are awarded for the purpose of enabling those suitably equipped to enjoy the benefits of a post-graduate sojourn abroad; yet New York City, where congregates the large proportion of art workers, provides no proper accommodation for the exhibition of the result of all this expensive and complex study. It is true that two small exhibitions are held in the Fine Arts Building in Fifty-seventh Street under the auspices of the National Academy and at its expense, but the pictures shown have to be crowded into a series of small and ill-lighted galleries, thus neutralizing to a very great extent the beneficial influence of our schools, prizes and scholarships.

What is the use of all this preparation if its outcome cannot be made public? About three thousand five hundred pictures are annually submitted to the Academy jury, a very small proportion of which can be hung and the greater proportion of which come from New York City workers. Of these two exhibitions the interest, both on
"GIRL WITH PARASOL": ROBERT HENRI, PAINTER:
"WICKFORD": W. J. GLACKENS, PAINTER:
FROM THE WINTER EXHIBITION OF THE
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN, 1909.
"SEA-GULLS": ERNEST LAWSON, PAINTER:
FROM THE WINTER EXHIBITION OF THE
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN, 1909.
"GIRL AND HORSE": IRVING WILES, PAINTER:
FROM THE WINTER EXHIBITION OF THE
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN, 1909.
THE VALUE OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY

the part of the public and the artists, is greater in the spring, yet some idea of the crying need for larger galleries may be understood when it becomes generally known that for the recent winter exhibition almost sixteen hundred pictures were sent in. Of these, many that were accepted were crowded out from lack of space. The jury, while constantly trying to keep in mind the limited capacity of the walls at their disposal, found their task a difficult one, as the standard of the pictures was so high that several hundred were approved which could not be hung, while many quite sufficiently worthy to be shown were necessarily refused.

Many of the most interesting and important works of native painters and all of the important work of our sculptors go to make up the fine exhibitions held in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and all the other cities which have been sufficiently far-sighted to provide them with an appropriate setting. We can, it is true, show in New York a small proportion of the good things painted each year, but American sculpture, which is more and more taking the lead in the world, is given no chance whatever. To find a large enough exhibition place last year the Society of American Sculptors was obliged to go to Baltimore at an expense and loss of time to the workers which can hardly be estimated.

One fact not generally appreciated by the layman is that the educational value of an exhibition is not only important for the public, but is of indispensable value to the exhibitor. It is necessary that the exhibitor shall be able to see his work in juxtaposition with the work of other artists to bring him to a realization of his own shortcomings. Seeing his work unfavored by surroundings and position enables the serious worker to justly appreciate its value and understand its weakness. A healthy realization of weakness is sure to be of benefit to him in his future undertakings.

Our Museum, which now rivals many of its European prototypes and which is run on a broad educational basis, of course fills a great place in the art work of this city. It spares neither time nor effort in the organizing of loan exhibitions, and it is slowly accumulating a permanent and representative collection of American painting and sculpture. The quality of its efforts can be measured by the wonderful Hudson-Fulton exhibit of this fall, but admirable as is the Museum’s work and accomplishment it cannot be held to take the place of a gallery with ample provision for current art.

What we need is a building with spacious well-lighted galleries in an accessible locality; a building which should never be closed and where the decorators, architects, illustrators, engravers and craftsmen
could find room, as well as the painters and sculptors. Until we can
secure this, New York will continue to miss much that is best in all
these branches. The first city of our country should possess a build-
ing which will admit of exhibitions to which the artists of all parts
of the United States would contribute,—an exhibition modeled on
those held in Paris, London, Berlin, etc. Galleries could, from time
to time, be filled with representative collections of work from different
sections of the country.

There are groups of artists in the West and Middle West which
have a distinct character of their own. These collections would be
most instructive and stimulating, would add fresh interest to any
exhibition and would certainly attract a much larger public here
than it would be possible to gather together anywhere else in America.

With our enormous floating population the effect of a recognized
representative exhibition would soon make itself felt over the entire
country. This exhibition should be the Salon of America. To
accomplish the erection of a building such as this is now the obvious
duty of the most important existing art institution in the country—
The National Academy of Design. Comprising as it does, with a
few exceptions, all the prominent artists of the country, it seems the
natural and fitting sponsor for this undertaking.

**Editor's Note.**—All illustrations used in this article were selected from the two hundred
and seventy-one paintings shown at the National Academy exhibition of the winter of nine-
teen hundred and nine. The collection does not present any one expression or school of
American art, but rather the varied achievement of manifestly significant artists. Among
them are men who have watched the progress of more than one art movement in this
country. They are all representatively American, some of them definitely of the pioneer
spirit, possibly witnesses to revolutionary ideas which in the end may breed a new and
interesting institution for its own preservation. The collection of pictures which illustrates
this article was selected by The Craftsman Magazine.

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**GREATNESS**

Not in some one great deed does greatness lie,
   But in the brave frank meeting, face to face,
Of all the thousand little things that try
   The soul's true temper for a higher place.

Arthur Wallace Peach.