AMERICAN ART IN GERMANY: THE VALUE OF OUR PRESENT EXHIBITION IN BERLIN AND MUNICH: BY CHRISTIAN BINTON

The day of intellectual and artistic reciprocity is manifestly at hand, and no two nations better illustrate this most enlightened of modern cultural movements than do Germany and America. The recently established system of exchange professors is already producing admirable results, and there is every reason to hope that a similar situation may obtain in the sensitive and persuasive province of the fine arts. In the field of the intellect the equilibrium between the two countries has been moderately well maintained. The majority of American college professors have studied and taken their doctorates at the various German universities, and Germany has in turn given the United States a brilliant succession of high-minded thinkers as well as sterling patriots. In manners aesthetic, however, the balance has by no means been so carefully adjusted. For numerous reasons Americans are more conversant with German art than are Germans with the American product. Many of our foremost painters have been trained either at Düsseldorf or Munich, and have brought back Teutonic sympathies and certain scrupulous technical methods which have not been without influence upon the native school. There has furthermore been for generations a public eager to possess examples by the leading German masters of the day; in addition to this, the expositions at Chicago and St. Louis measurably advanced a knowledge of the subject. All this has nevertheless been in a sense circumstantial and even accidental. The first conscious and deliberate move toward establishing artistic reciprocity between these two great nations, both so progressive and so legitimately ambitious, was made last season when there was held at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, at Copley Hall, Boston, and at the Art Institute of Chicago, a notable exhibition of contemporary German art. It is this latter event which more than anything increased current American interest in Teutonic achievement, and which, in large measure, is responsible for its logical sequel—the present exhibition of American painting in Berlin and Munich.

The reasons why Germany has up to the present time known but little of the art which this display serves so opportunely to introduce are not far to seek. During many arid and dubious years there was no such thing as American painting, and later it was so tentative in quality and so slender and widely scattered in quantity that its very existence was barely recognizable. The geographical isolation
From the Exhibition of American Art in Berlin.

PORTRAIT OF MRS. WILLIAM ROCKWELL
CLARKE: ROBERT HENRI, PAINTER.
From the Exhibition of American Art in Berlin.

"MARCH SNOW": ELMER W. SCHOFIELD, PAINTER.
From the Exhibition of American Art in Berlin.
By Permission of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

"NOVEMBER": ROBERT WILLIAMS VONNOH, PAINTER.
From the Exhibition of American Art in Berlin.

"GOLDEN DAYS": LILLIAN GENTH, PAINTER.
From the Exhibition of American Art in Berlin.

"THE QUIET CORNER": IRVING R. WILES, PAINTER.
of America, the stern problems of early conquest and self-preservation in a new country, and the long period of enforced provincialism each rendered the evolution of aesthetic expression both difficult and precarious. Once painting in America may be said to have gained a footing, its leanings were naturally toward the English school, and subsequent influences have, save for a brief interlude, been almost exclusively French. There has thus been little possibility of enlisting German interest, and scant opportunity for increasing any latent curiosity. The points of contact have been few, especially since Americans exhibit regularly at that great international art bazaar, the Paris Salon, and only intermittently in the Fatherland. In view of these facts particular significance attaches to the exhibition in Berlin and Munich. It is the first time American painting has been adequately presented to the German public. It places before Teutonic eyes an art which offers many new and distinctive features, and which has matured under conditions never duplicated in the history of aesthetic development.

The exhibition which is attracting the Berlin and Munich public in such numbers to the Kunst Akademie in the former city and to the Kunstverein in the latter, owes its inception, as did that of contemporary German art at the Metropolitan Museum last year, to the enthusiasm and liberality of a single individual. Already well known on both sides of the water as the possessor of an exceptional collection of modern international art, Mr. Hugo Reisinger encountered little difficulty in enlisting in each instance the highest official patronage. He has shown American painting under the most favorable auspices, and naturally his efforts have met with corresponding appreciation.

Profiting by his experience in organizing the exhibition of German art, Mr. Reisinger, in the present case, has made a distinct advance upon his previous undertaking. Not only is the collection of American painting now on view in Germany numerically more imposing, it is also more comprehensive and representative. The period covered is substantially the same, the German display having begun with those great pioneers of the modern movement, Menzel, Böcklin, Lenbach and Leibl, and the American starting very properly with such pathfinders as Fuller, Hunt, Inness and LaFarge. In each case the development of pictorial art has been carried down to our own day, the joyous pantheists of the "Scholle," among them Putz, Erler and Münzer, being paralleled with us by Henri, Luks, Glackens, Bellows and their colleagues. Guided by a kindred sense of conservatism, Mr. Reisinger paused, however, in both instances before
those more advanced tendencies which in Germany are represented
by the leading spirits of the Berlin Secession, and on this side by those
brilliant experimentalists who, under the protecting ægis of Mr.
Alfred Stieglitz, are now creating such turmoil in the breasts of the
timid.

AMERICAN art is predominantly Anglo-Saxon in its inception.
It was initially fostered by the stern Puritan of New England
and the sturdy Quaker of Pennsylvania, and in its early
manifestations evinced decidedly more moral rigor than sensuous
charm. Though conditions have changed considerably with time,
Puritanism still persists in our midst, together with its legacy of
prudishness and even hypocrisy. Furthermore, we unfortunately
find few congenial fields for the employment of the figure. We have
no pagan myths or classic traditions; we have no deep religious
convictions and we are lacking in creative imagination or a taste for the
symbolical. Art is a social product, and no one can form a discerning
estimate of a nation's painting without some knowledge of forces that
are broadly human as well as specifically aesthetic. This viewpoint
toward American painting is precisely what the foreign public is apt
to overlook. We render the spirit of landscape with singular per-
ception because the aspect of our land is familiar and full of signifi-
cance to us; we paint the figure feebly or not at all because the figure
has never become a vital part of our artistic consciousness. These
facts should go far toward explaining the situation to our German
friends and incidentally accounting for the lack of important work of
this class in any collection of American art.

With a single ungracious exception, all the owners, whether public
or private, of important American pictures have been generosity itself
toward Mr. Reisinger regarding the loan of canvases for the German
display. The Metropolitan Museum, the Pennsylvania Academy
of Fine Arts, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the newly organized
National Gallery of Washington, the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh,
and the Museums of Chicago, Buffalo, Cincinnati and Worcester,
have all been drawn upon, while among private owners the names of
Mr. Freer, Mr. Canfield, Sir William Van Horne and Mr. Evans
figure prominently among those who have cordially supported the
undertaking. It is incredible that any collector should fail to appre-
ciate the service to American painting of such fundamental courtesy.
Our country was sadly misrepresented last summer at the Venice
International Exhibition, and every effort should be made to redeem
such a disgrace and to render its repetition impossible. Realizing
the situation, Mr. Reisinger's activities were unceasing, and fortu-
nately the proper support was forthcoming. In a higher sense, collectors should not consider themselves the owners of pictures but merely their temporary custodians, and the sooner this view is taken the better for the interests of art in general.

The scope of the display is confined entirely to contemporary production, no examples whatever being selected from the Colonial epoch or from the works of those patient and industrious early landscapists who constituted our first really native school. Of that great quartette, however, through whose efforts our painting was finally freed from its long period of provincialism—Fuller, Hunt, Inness and LaFarge—the exhibition contains numerous typical canvases. The caressing and penetrant vision of Fuller is recalled by the three-quarter length of “Nydia” from the Metropolitan Museum, while the free brush and fine observation of Hunt find expression in “The Bather” and two other subjects of interest loaned by Mrs. Enid Hunt Slater of Washington. To Inness, the first and still the foremost exponent of emotion in American landscape, have also been allotted three canvases, “The Delaware Valley” and “Autumn Oaks” from the Metropolitan and “Sunshine and Clouds” from the collection of Mr. Evans. So varied in his activities and so eclectic in his inspiration, LaFarge was a difficult man adequately to represent. These men, who typify phases of native art which are already of the past, were closely followed by the two great landscapists of the transition period, Homer D. Martin and Alexander Wyant, who further paved the way for the future and whose work of necessity finds place in the current display. That fine canvas formerly known as “Harp of the Winds” but now called “View of the Seine,” is Martin’s chief contribution, while from Wyant’s more sensitive and poetic brush are three pictures, the most important being “View in County Kerry” which is likewise familiar to visitors at the Metropolitan Museum. With these men closes what may be termed the retrospective section of the display, figures like Albert P. Ryder and Ralph A. Blakelock occupying a place apart. They are both individualists in the extreme sense of the word. Their lives have been passed in isolation, and, though owing much to surrounding influences, works such as Ryder’s “Siegfried” and Blakelock’s “Moonlight” and “The Pow-Wow” belong to the romantic by-paths of artistic production, not to those broad channels of progress upon which are built the successes of the men of the middle and later periods.

It is obvious that our art did not achieve conscious and characteristic expression until the coming of those two radically opposite but equally national painters, James McNeill Whistler and Winslow
Homer, both of whom are this year introduced to Germany for what is practically the first time. Owing to the liberality of Mr. Freer and Mr. Canfield, the delicate and subjective art of Whistler is being splendidly represented in Berlin and Munich. While it is true that the simultaneous exhibition of some forty-odd Whistlers at the Metropolitan Museum has deprived Mr. Reisinger of several desirable canvases, yet the incomparable “Balcony,” “Phryne,” “Nocturne—Blue and Silver,” and other subjects, supplemented as they are by a number of pastels and etchings, give a fulfilling idea of the subtle magic of the brush which seems never to lose its freshness and appeal. In direct antithesis to the elusive vision of Whistler stands the sturdy objectivity of Winslow Homer. In his marines Homer reaches the apex of his achievement, and of these Germany has the pleasure of seeing four examples, the most important being “The Gulf Stream” from the Metropolitan, and “All’s Well” from Boston. Heightened by a sure sense of dramatic effect, the stirring naturalism of Homer’s art has not failed to arouse enthusiasm. If in the realm of the spirit Whistler stands first, in the vigorous, visible world the name of Winslow Homer is preëminent in American painting. The one is psychic in essence, the other physical, and neither has as yet been surpassed in his particular province, though each has given his countrymen a legacy which can be traced through many channels of development.

It would be manifestly pedantic to enumerate all the painters who have been selected for appearance in the Fatherland. Notable among the figure men are Thayer and Brush, who in different ways perpetuate the academic tradition, and Alexander and Dewing who owe not a little to the persuasive spell of Whistler. Each of these latter is represented by characteristic works, Alexander’s most typical canvas being the fluent and aristocratic “Portrait of Mrs. Alexander,” and Dewing’s “Before Sunrise” and “Lady Playing the Violoncello,” giving a welcome idea of a vision which is ever refined and tenderly transubstantial. Needless to say, certain of the older men such as Chase and Duveneck, who have done so much for the progress of art in America, have not been overlooked, nor has that brilliant array of expatriates living in Paris or London, including Dännat, Sargent, Harrison, Mary Cassatt, Mark Fisher, Walter Gay, McClure Hamilton and George Hitchcock been in anywise neglected. The sound draughtsmanship, clear tonality and strong characterization of another distinguished internationalist, Gari Melchers, find full scope in his “Mother and Child” and “Portrait of President Roosevelt,” both of which were accorded special praise by the German Emperor. There is also a group of still younger men who possess marked Euro-
pean affiliations, and it is a pleasure to note that they, too, find place with the others; among them being Walter McEwen, Robert McCam-
eron, George Elmer Browne, Henry S. Hubbell and the two brilliant and effective newcomers, Richard H. Miller and F. C. Frieseke.

The real strength of the exhibition lies not, however, with these more or less cosmopolitan painters, but with those who, after receiving their Continental training, returned home to face adverse conditions and to achieve their hard-won successes on native soil. While fully sensible to the subdued appeal of the tonalists such as Dewey, Ranger, Minor, Murphy, Tryon and their pendants, it is a matter of record that chief interest attached to the members of the "Ten" and to those in sympathy with their particular aims and efforts. It is only natural that the vibrant glory of Hassam's palette, the clear-toned lyricism of Metcalf, the pictorial eloquence of Reid, and the broad vision and fine handling of Tarbell, Benson and DeCamp, should entitle them to a full measure of Teutonic approval. Equal praise was bestowed upon still newer and more vigorous personalities, notably Redfield, Schofield, Dougherty and Lillian Genth, while with them may be mentioned the work of Glackens, Henri, Bellows and Luks, which is so full of youthful gusto and the desire to escape from the sentimental and the commonplace. In portraiture, Sargent, Chase, Wiles, Cecilia Beaux, Henri, Ben-Ali Haggin, Funk, Schevill and Müller-Ury are among those represented. If one may except Sargent's supple full length of "Graham Robertson," Robert Henri's Portrait of Mrs. William Rockwell Clarke and Ben-Ali Haggin's decoratively conceived "Mme. Hanako," together with the works of Melchers and Alexander and others already mentioned, there is not much of compelling moment in this difficult province.

Despite certain inevitable shortcomings there is on the whole reasonable cause for self-congratulation on the outcome of our first important exhibition of American painting in Germany. Without question, the Germans are the most progressive and open-minded of latter-day Europeans. They do not accept all we have accomplished with equal enthusiasm, but their general attitude has been most gratifying. There is distinct value to be derived from such undertakings as the one here under consideration. American painting is undeniably brilliant, sensitive and eclectic, yet in academic circles there is a tendency toward narrowness which must be combatted if our art is to attain higher development. We have not entirely cast off that provincialism which has so long restricted our aesthetic and intellectual growth, and nothing could be more fruitful or stim-
ulating than regularly submitting our achievements to the test of enlightened foreign opinion.