ART AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC: HOW THEY CAN GET TOGETHER FOR THEIR MUTUAL BENEFIT: BY JOSEPH PENNELL

WHISTLER once said, “There never was an artistic age, there never was an artistic people.” But America—his own country—has disproved that, has it not? We have more galleries, more exhibitions, more prizes, more patrons, more encouragement, more painters, than any other country had before the war—but art is not confined to paint, though some modern painters would like to make the public think so, and do their best to prove it. There are sculptors who have commissions for years ahead, so numerous, I am told, are these commissions; architects who are working night and day to change the face and the skyline of the country and the cities; illustrators not a few of whom prove by their work that they are perfectly familiar with the technique of all their fellows, and who turn out so much that I scarce see how they have the time.

Dealers in New York crowd and jostle each other, and there is not a little city anywhere without an art shop. All over this broad land there are growing up the most valuable and interesting or curious collections and collectors.

There is hardly a town without its art gallery, society or club, while the whole affair is governed, directed and managed by a central authority. Even the cities tax themselves for the support of art, artists and art galleries. Art education has been given a place in schools and colleges. Traveling and perambulating lecturers and docents explain and point out that which might be obscure to the unwary, and even babes—at least they would be babes anywhere else—vote on the merits of their favorites.

Murals are seen on the walls of every public building and many of the private houses one goes to. We are all art critics, and so have no use for the professionals who would instruct us. We are all amateurs and know just what we like, and art has descended upon us and is all over us. There never was such a time, such an opportunity, and there never were so many artists, so much encouragement of them, things never were going so well. As I have said, every town, big and little, has its gallery, many an academy or society, but I overlooked one matter in this revival of art—there is no place on Manhattan Island where an art society or an artist can show in a public gallery, there is no municipal or public gallery in the city of New York (Brooklyn has taken its place). There is but one other great city in the world—London—and London shares with New York the glory of patronizing artists and suppressing their work.
OLD AND NEW New York:
An etching by Joseph Pennell.
TIMES BUILDING in the process of construction: An etching by Joseph Pennell.
MUTUAL LIFE BUILDING, Union Square: An etching by Joseph Pennell.
NOW I happen to know something of the condition of affairs in some other great cities of the world. In London the Royal Academy dominates art, and has dominated it for one hundred and fifty years, and will dominate it almost certainly for another hundred and fifty. The method and the reason are as plain as they are carefully hidden.

The Royal Academy cares little for opposition from artists, for if an artist is strong enough to oppose it, and forms a strong enough society to offer strenuous opposition to it, some of the most prominent members of that society are offered membership in the Royal Academy, and they accept, and the power and backbone of the new society are broken. And why do these one-time independent artists accept? For three reasons—their pictures are given a place on the line in every exhibition; they are given social precedence in England; but most important, though least known and carefully concealed, they are given a pension, to say nothing of a palace—dinners, and if officials in the Academy, a salary. An Academy which gives these privileges to its forty members and thirty associates as well as getting its galleries and schoolrooms free, ought to be pretty sure of itself. But it is not—and it will do nothing or has done nothing toward starting a public exhibition gallery in London; though it could do everything. But what is more, though its galleries are unused from August to December, it will not let any other society, any other artists, use them. It will not allow any other body of artists to interfere with its rights and privileges or prestige. Every art society in England contains academicians amongst its members, and so far as I know, and I do know, these societies either have members in the Academy as their officials or are dominated by them. For reasons I have stated, almost every artist resident in Great Britain strives and struggles to get in; even Whistler's name was down for years, and to the everlasting disgrace of the American members, who could have easily elected him, they never did, preferring their pals,—and so there is no public gallery in London.

The Academy also, or members of it, called Charity Trustees, purchase the only modern works officially purchased for the Tate Gallery. The State and County Council believe in the Academy, and would never encourage art that it opposed or erect or support any gallery for modern art that it did not approve of; and the Royal Academy disapproves of all modern art, all galleries but its own. Its conduct has been investigated before Royal commissions and censured, and that is all that happens. The Royal Academy goes on, though almost every British provincial city has a public gallery for the exhibition of modern work and an annual exhibition, and they each
encourage art and artists by the purchase annually of large numbers of works from these exhibitions. Every important city on the continent of Europe that I know has a public art gallery in which modern art is shown, located in a public park, and these galleries and expositions are either managed by the state or city, or the gallery is turned over to various societies at various times to make their own exhibitions, and usually the authorities make a grant for their expenses or pay the bill if there is a deficit; and here to a practical nation of practical business people, as we are never tired of calling ourselves, is a practical proposition.

I will take two typical cases, the city of Venice and the city of Paris. Some fifteen or more years ago, the city of Venice, or rather Professor Fradeletto, Signor Grimani, the Sindic, at any rate, these names stood and still stand out, conceived the idea of holding an art exhibition in that city. They knew it must be in the city and accessible; they seized the public garden, the playground of Venice. I believe there was opposition, but the press and the public do not, save in war and strikes, dominate Italy; one half nearly of the garden was taken and enclosed, though this was done gradually. The people were told it would pay Venice—dead despite the business man and the shipping man and the Government’s plans and expenditures—again make it a seaport.

The city was absolutely dead in the summer when the scheme of making it the art center of the world occurred to these City Fathers. Outside the chromo and the photo shops in the Piazza, there was no place for the modern Venetian to exhibit. Though every artist went to Venice to work, he never “showed” there. In fact, about eighteen hundred and eighty, when the artists protested against the turning of one of the islands into an arsenal or a hospital, the Sindic (the Mayor) replied he hoped the day would come, and soon, when Venice would be so changed that not an artist would want to visit it. It has changed, and how has this come about? In the beginning there was no place for the artists to show, but in the Public Garden a permanent one was put up, the most eminent artists were invited, others were permitted to submit. Their works were judged by an International Jury, all the expenses of transport, insurance and installation were paid by the city, prizes in money and medals were offered, and it was announced that the state and city would make purchases. The critics of the world were invited, too, and their expenses paid, to attend on a press day before the opening, and they were treated to excursions and dinners far better, in fact, than the artists even. Prizes were offered for their criticisms of the exhibition. Ambassadors
and patrons were brought in special trains and received in state. Even the advertisements distributed broadcast were artistic, and the literature worth reading and well printed.

So well was the whole affair managed and advertised, that Venice woke up to find itself, what we are never tired of saying we will be some time, the art center of the world today. And what has been the result? From that day to this the management has remained in the same hands. First the people were appeased because the exhibition was opened officially by the King, who bought a number of works; the various government officials bought works for their departments; the city of Venice bought works; private syndicates of Venetian merchants, especially the hotel keepers, bought works; the greatest publicity was given to these facts; the public and artists came to see what was being shown and bought, and to do so, they were given return tickets good for nine months over any Italian state railway or steamship from the frontier and back at greatly reduced rates. And the public came in thousands, saw, and they too bought. The result was and is that Venice woke up; the Piazza was crowded, the hotels that were empty became so full that new ones had to be built, and as there was no room in the city, the sandy waste of the Lido became another city.

So great was the success, and the rows over awarding the money prizes, that they never were given again. So great were the sales, so great the publicity, that the most eminent artists strove to be represented. All the while the same management continued, and made themselves the dictators and the final jury, but there are benevolent autocrats and intelligent dictators. The success increased; collectors and dealers and museum directors came from all over Europe, a few even from America, to see modern art. The city ceased to give medals, but it bought more works, and it purchased a palace for a modern museum to put its acquisitions in, and the artists of Europe and the Americans of Europe showed an increasing eagerness to have their work shown, to get on the Jury, to attend the opening, the State Banquet in the Doge’s Palace, and the other functions.

Then another idea occurred to the directors; they took over more of the park and they put up small galleries in it. There is now but a strip at the front left the public when the exhibition is over, and even that is closed at official functions. These small galleries were offered to various nations, one to the United States, and refused, only to be purchased for Great Britain, not by its Government, but by a private individual, and turned over to a British Art Committee. The other nations purchased theirs, and over them, as
over Embassies, float national flags. And here was the scheme: as
the pavilions are national, each nation fills its gallery as it likes, and
pays its own expenses, save that the superior Jury, the directors, can
reject anything, even though hung, that they object to. The result
is the main exposition building is given over one-half to Italian art
and the other half, or rather about one-third, to collective exhibits by
artists, living or dead, whom the directors wish to honor, to make
known in Italy. Several Americans have already been so honored—
Bartlett, Miller, Freiseke, Sargent and myself amongst others. After
the pavilion was refused by the United States, three rooms were
offered free to the National Academy, and a more commonplace
collection could not have been exhibited. Good enough; the assump-
tion, later carried out at Rome, being that anything was good enough
for the Dagoes. Some works that were sent were rejected; and when
I, representing the country on the Jury, asked why, I was told,
because they were not up to the Venetian standard, and I could but
agree; in fact, the statement, the last statement, made by Frank
Millet in Rome at the American garage hencoop palace gallery,
that “American art had got a black eye it would not get over in
Europe for twenty-five years,” was perfectly true. And at the open-
ing of the American Galleries that year the American ambassador
was conspicuous by his absence. To sum up this example, Venice
is the art metropolis of the world today. The papers are out for
next year, and the show will be held if the city still stands. The
last exhibition suffered terribly from this terrible war, but at the
previous one I believe more than half the works exhibited were
sold, and sold to collectors all over the world; and owing to this
exhibition of the Fine Arts, Venice is again a prosperous, a flourishing
city.

As to Paris, have not the salons held in a public park for a century
brought tourists, amateurs, collectors and artists, and with them
endless money that they spend, to Paris? So well is this known,
that the Grand and Petit Palais are never without, or were not till
this war, a show in them.

Berlin, Barcelona, Munich, Budapest, Brussels, Venice, Rome, all
have shows of modern art in modern galleries, built and owned by
the states or cities and all in public parks. Even London has its
annual academy, but that and the millions of shillings it has brought
are for the members and not for art, but for Academicians, as is
ture of our Academy. Here is this hustling, business, go-ahead,
commercial, even artistic city of New York. What have we got in
the way of a gallery for the Academy or any society as a public gallery
for the exhibition of modern art? Nothing; and this has been pre-
vented by cranks who leave the park open to the grossest indecency—landscape gardeners who don’t mind the whole place being littered with newspapers and other similar rubbish, enthusiasts who endlessly talk of encouraging art and artists, and when a practical suggestion is made that we should encourage it and add millions to the revenue of the city and incidentally to artists, suppress every attempt to erect what every other city save London—they are known, many of them, anglomaniacs—has got. Look, for example, at the popular exhibition lately held in New York, Sorolla and the Futurists, which brought in millions, and yet not one cent can be spent or one inch of ground given for the exhibition of American art in the greatest American city. It is the most pitiful exhibition of American artlessness that the world has ever seen, a farce funnier than our comics to Europeans, a sad spectacle indeed to the few Americans who know a loss of revenue that the average American business man seems unaware of; something to be ashamed of, something that can and must be changed. We must have a gallery in Central Park, and the city or the State must support it as they do the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum. By so doing they would really encourage modern art, as every other city in Europe does—save London.

A FARM AND CULTURE

A MAN should have a farm or a mechanical craft for his culture. We must have a basis for our higher accomplishments, our delicate entertainments of poetry and philosophy, in the work of our hands. Manual labor is the study of the external world. The advantages of riches remain with him who procured them, not with the heir. I feel some shame before my woodchopper, my ploughman and my cook, for they have some sort of self-sufficiency; they can contrive without my aid to bring the day and year round, but I depend on them, and have not earned by use a right to my arms and feet.

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