

# PAINTING UNDER THE OCEAN

## Artist Opens Studio At Bottom Of Sea.

Result of Queer Undertaking Is Strangely Interesting and Attractive Pictures of Submarine Scenes—Painting Pictures of Strange Deep Sea Creatures.



Mr. Pritchard Dressed For Work When Using The "Diver's Goggles." The Latter Shown Suspended About His Neck.



Coral Formation In The South Sea.

In a special salon at Chicago there was recently placed on exhibition a collection of what are undoubtedly the most unique paintings in the world. They are unparalleled in art in that they were painted literally at the bottom of the ocean.

The founder of the new school of submarine painting is a young Californian, Zach Howlison Pritchard, who lives at Pasadena. Like many a possessor of genius, he endured the bitterness of poverty and the sneers of those who scoff at anything which is an innovation. London refused to buy his works or to perceive that he had opened a novel and wonderful field in art. It was Sarah Bernhardt who first recognized his talent. Among his patrons today are Mrs. Russell Sage and Miss Helen Gould.

The fishes of Tahiti, in the South Sea Islands, were started one day two Winters ago by an intruder who descended through their waters, carrying a stone to make him sink, and alighted on a pink coral pillar. The man produced a slab of plate glass, a pouch full of crayons, a sheet of drawing paper, and sketched swiftly. The diver's helmet, which he wore emitted a stream of bubbles, while the sunlit masses ahead were outlined in color on the paper. After working for 15 or 20 minutes the man paddled himself to the surface of the water.

Mr. Pritchard works in a way easy to understand. He has devised an extraordinary set of apparatus in order to paint pictures under the water. He goes down in a diving suit furnished with pearl diver's glasses. He uses an easel and palette made of glass in order that they may remain at the bottom. French waterproof crayons and pieces of cardboard rubbed with oil complete his outfit. Nothing more is needed except the courage to descend, the ability to select what to sketch and to sketch it quickly. Nature and practice have given these to Mr. Pritchard, who, however, was years in thinking out ways and means.

But in the end he made a reality of what was called an absurd dream and devised his own tools for the task—tools whose use he knows so well that he has long years the start of any follower.

Of course, Mr. Pritchard does not finish his paintings beneath the water. He makes sketches in crayon for them there, transcribing form, noting color, disarranging fish, smudging in distance, delicately, feeling for the precise color harmony that can never be wholly brought from the depths, then ascends to fix the scene enduringly. This he does on leather. On leather alone, says the artist, can he reproduce anything like the tone of the sea world.

Reproducing Delicate Tints. He has tried canvas, but there he loses the delicate blue, which in the sea takes the place of atmosphere. Instead of painting with oil, he uses powdered color chalks mixed with spirits

and resin in proportions found by long experiment. That mixture, besides being durable, gives the veil-like aspect that lies over everything submarine. Thus the picture is a thing apart; painted with new colors on a novel material, of a huge, dim nearby world, where man is a stranger.

Mr. Pritchard is an Irishman, with the "Celtic madness" (more common, only, in that race than elsewhere) which gives as much fire as is needed to do great things. He was born in India, and when he was 10 was sent to school in Scotland. He spent his Summers with an aunt in Loosemouth, on the northeast Scottish coast. The rough sports he shared with his fellows led him into water. They play a game there—a game that demands stout lungs, deep diving, grit; in reality, it is our own boys' game of tag adapted, as a race of Vikings might adapt it, to use in and under water.

Playing this game from day to day, there soon came the power to remain under water for many seconds and the ability to observe quickly and with precision. It was the wonderful tones in blue and green the bodies of his swimming playmates took on that first drew the boy's attention to the beauties of the submerged world. A little later the object that fascinated him was a group of fir trees washed down from the mountains in the great Springtime freshets. These trees lay in deep water and had become the center of a mass of new vegetation, and here, again, the dominant attraction that fascinated him was color. The greens of the fir were so mottled and blended with the diffused sunlight, and the sunlight so broken by the waving masses of growing weeds that a thousand and one colors and new harmonies of tint were re-

One Of The Submarines Purchased By Miss. Helen Gould.

vealed to the sensitive eye of the untrained boy.

Day after day he made his descents to study his fir, and day after day in sun and cloud, in storm or calm, he caught his impressions, and the marvelous thing was that never were two alike. It was this mutable beauty that was so fascinating, and through the ensuing years it urged him, wherever he was, by lake or sea, to take opportunity to view the depths for his own pleasure and without any idea of painting them.

Bernhardt Gives Him a Start.

In the meantime, as an art student he had drifted to landscape work, and as a matter of interest had begun seeking a means for coloring leather. Then he began to indicate on this medium what he remembered of the things he had seen under water. First results were so grotesque that people laughed at him. When he took a number of his paintings to London, the critics pronounced them monstrous, and advised the young artist to go home and paint something that people liked to see. "You paint for London as if you thought it was inhabited by fishes," cried Ellen Terry, as she looked through the water at the base of the Giant's Causeway, which rise from the ocean at the entrance to the Irish Sea. In his disappointment young Pritchard actually thought of suicide.

To take his thoughts off morbidity the artist spent almost his last shilling to see Bernhardt, who was then playing in London in "Salome." Her acting was perfect, he thought, but one of her gowns, a robe designed for a sea sorcerer, lacked something. The young man, poor except in ideas, who knew the strange colors of the sea as perhaps



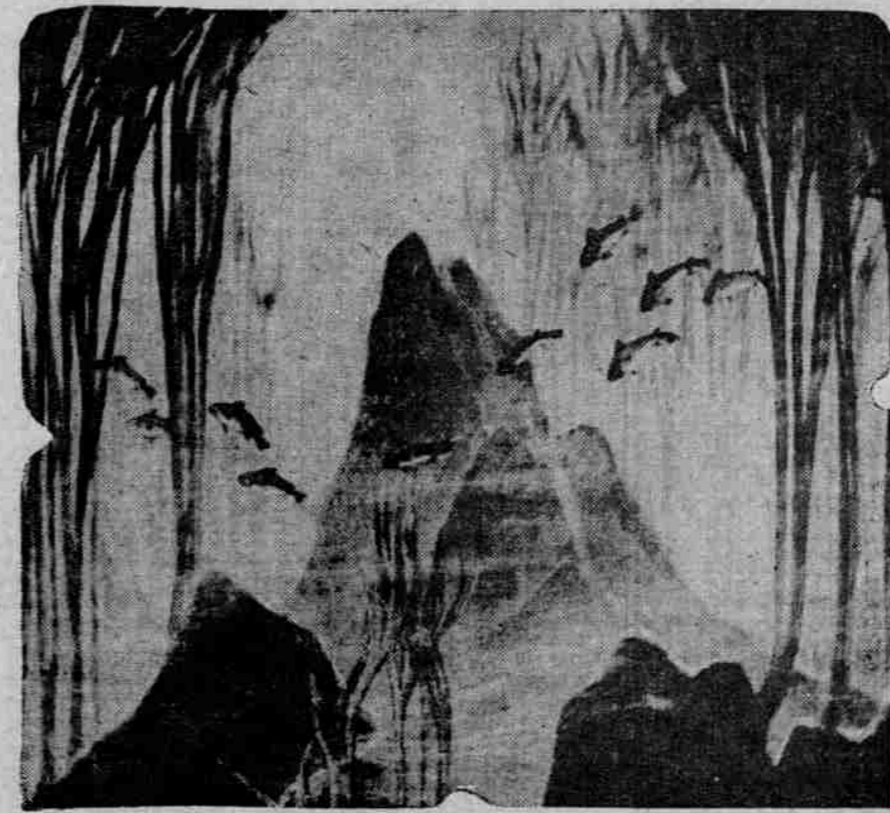
no one else did, instantly resolved to tell her what it needed. He tried to speak to her as she left the theater that night, but her escort repulsed him. He waited five hours in her hotel. She finally sent him word to go to the theater that evening.

Bernhardt, all but enclosed in three great pier glasses, swept her eyes up and down the artist's reflection as he entered her dressing-room. Before he had spoken 20 words her enthusiasm equaled his, and in five minutes she had ordered Salome's jewels from the designs he made on visiting cards. The great woman saw that he knew the sea, and she probably divined that he was penniless. She gave him £20 as an advance on the jewels which were to look like the sea.

Bernhardt also lent him her ear when he told her how he had made pictures of the world beneath the water. Her imagination was kindled and when she saw the paintings she immediately bought two of them.

But the man could not live always on Bernhardt's money. From the press her order gave him he gradually drifted into general decorative work. He painted on leather always, and started the wave of leather painting which broke in America into such abominations of art. For years he kept working away from the sea, in alien lines. Then his health gave out and he was banished from England.

About this time he learned from one



Painting Showing Sand Heaps On The Bed Of The Sea.

of Darwin's books that the most marvelous coral formations were to be found in the waters of the South Sea Islands, and this led him to go to Tahiti. Arriving there, he set about to devise some means by which he could go beneath the water and actually draw and color the wonders of the submarine world.

The first problem was to provide a suitable drawing board. He first tried an ordinary drawing board weighted down with coral, but found it impracticable. A sheet of zinc also proved to be useless. It then occurred to him to try glass. This suggestion came as a result of his use of a contrivance employed by the pearl divers of the South Seas, a small glass-bottomed box with a piece cut out at the top so that it can be gripped by the teeth, thereby permitting the swimmer free use of his arms. By means of this device there is always a calm space under the glass and it is possible for the user to view in that way the depths of the water in which he is swimming.

At Work Under Water.

Glass proved to be the ideal drawing board, as it would neither float nor warp, nor was it troubled by any atmospheric changes while out of the water. The paper used was what is known as double elephant drawing paper, soaked in coconut oil to make it waterproof, and fastened to the glass

by means of surgeon's waterproof tape. Equipped with this board and Raphaell compressed oil tubes the young artist was ready to make his descent into the ocean.

Many times he went down using only the goggles of the pearl divers, which are bits of cow horn cut and shaped to fit the eyes. The goggles formed a small space of air between the water and the eyes, thereby enabling one to see perfectly under water.

For sinking himself and his apparatus, Mr. Pritchard used a large piece of coral, attached to his belt by means of a hook. Having found, by means of the glass-bottomed box, the place he desired to sketch, he would put on his diving glasses, fasten himself to the lump of coral, and, after taking a good breath, lower himself over the side of his canoe. Reaching the bottom, he would settle himself upon the lump of coral, which he used as a seat, and then hastily sketch the scene he had chosen, being able to remain under the water from 30 to 45 seconds, according to the depth and pressure of the water. When ready to ascend, he would unfasten the lump of coral and float to the surface. The coral was then drawn up by means of a rope for another descent. After having made several descents in this manner, he would complete the sketch

and take sufficient color notes to enable him to finish his picture in his studio at his leisure. The use of a diving suit in later years enabled him to complete his sketches in one descent. He usually descends into the ocean at low tide, as there seems to be less disturbance in the sea at that time.

While some of Mr. Pritchard's best work was done at Tahiti, he has found excellent subjects off Santa Barbara. Miss Helen Gould visited his studio in Pasadena last Summer and purchased three pictures. One of the paintings showed a school of fish, the large fins of which cause them to resemble butterflies on the wing. This painting was made in a submarine "grove" on the south coast of England. The other works display a beautiful forest of polyps, amid which swim several of the chatodon, a fish that makes its home among polyps and corals. This was painted under the waters near Tahiti.

According to Mr. Pritchard, those who have been fascinated by views of the ocean's bed gained by rowing about in a glass-bottomed boat at Catalina have only a remote idea of the beauty and grandeur of the under water world. Beneath the water is a world, completely different from that of the air. It is a territory of quivering light and shade, of a profusion of strange colors, of plant forms of extreme delicacy and beauty, of sea creatures gorgeous and mysterious to the eyes.

"The coloring beneath the ocean is all in the lowest keys," says Mr. Pritchard, "merging from deep indigo and purple into the lighter delicate tints of pale greens, grays and yellows. Rocks and cliffs in the dim light assume an appearance of inconceivable size. You peer over the edge of a submarine abyss, and from the purple depths dart strange monsters who grow brighter as they near the upper water."

Strange Scenes Under Ocean.

"Many times I have been surprised by what seemed to be rivers flowing between the coral buttes, and would listen for the sound of waters, which I felt sure would be heard. But as I approached these rivers I found that they were only clean sand washed down by the action of the tides. In some instances where the sand has been washed near the top of a pinnacle, with the diffused sunlight upon it, the effect is that of a wonderful waterfall.

"When below, one is amazed to find that the surface of the water has become a mirror reflecting everything below it and shutting out the whole upper world. The absolute silence is thrilling. On land we see the foundations of every object, no matter how large or small its bulk, but when one looks into the depths of the huge coral formations under water, they seem to be resting upon deep blue air. I have mingled familiarly with the denizens of the deep. Lobsters, sharks and tunas have browsed at my feet and chased one another about my diver's helmet. These creatures are absolutely without fear of man, even in a diving dress, because they have never met him down in their world."