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Van Gogh and "Art"

"I don't know much about art, but I know what I like."

This classic remark represents the thinking of a lot of people when it comes to appraising the works of certain artists. We didn't happen to overhear it the other night at the opening of the showing of a collection of the works of Vincent van Gogh at the Portland Art Museum, but the expression on a lot of faces reflected a similar feeling.

The fact is, nowadays, that a lot of people know quite a bit about art, and the number, as well as the degree of knowledge, is growing.

INTEREST in art is an increasing phenomenon in America today. It is evidenced in a multitude of ways. One of them, surely, is the surprising fact that this van Gogh exhibit of 155 drawings and paintings, valued at some \$9 million, has been an "SRO" show wherever it has been.

In San Francisco, about 200,000 persons stood in line to see the paintings. In Portland Tuesday night, a crowd estimated at between 2,500 and 3,000 persons trooped into the museum for a "preview" invitation-only showing.

During the 33 days it will be in Portland, we will be surprised if fewer than 50,000 persons attend, and it might well be double that figure.

CONDITIONS at the "preview" were not ideal for a close, detailed or appreciative inspection of the paintings on display.

A writer in the Oregon Journal put it this way: "Those who could, looked at Vincent van Gogh's magnificent paintings and equally magnificent drawings. Those that couldn't quite see, craned to see what the others were looking at, and the rest just talked."

But, with patience, determination, and the judicious use of elbows, one could edge through the packed crowd to look at the paintings, and see what all the excitement was about.

Discounting the confusion caused by the assemblage of formally-dressed dignitaries, the turn-out of half-again as many people as was expected, and the constant and ear-splitting roar of many simultaneous conversations, the excitement was caused by the drawings and paintings of a man now dead less than 70 years, a man who died a "failure," insane and virtually unknown.

THE art of reproduction being what it is, anyone with half an eye is today familiar with some of van Gogh's paintings. So what is to be gained by viewing the originals?

Partly, perhaps, the attraction is that they are fabulously valuable. Partly it is because he is now in the midst of a wave of popularity, and it is "the thing to do" to see his work.

But principally it is because anyone in tune at all with what painting is, and is attempting to be, will realize that the man was, in his own way, a genius with the paintbrush, evoking in the viewer a variety of emotional responses.

And, despite the quality of today's reproductions, the originals do this as prints and copies cannot.

MOST painters do not attempt to reproduce objects in the same sense that they are reproduced by a camera.

To a degree, they project themselves into the picture they are creating. In doing so, they may paint a picture which "looks like something," or they may create an abstraction which looks like nothing in the natural world. In either case, it is their own creation, and a painter's success is measured in how well he communicates the emotions he himself felt while painting the picture.

If he fails in this communication, it can be the fault of the painter. Or it can be the fault of the viewer, if he has not the background, the understanding or the comprehension of the artist's aims necessary to "receive" the message.

IT MUST follow, then, that the public of today is far more responsive to van Gogh's work than was the public of 70 or 80 years ago. For the pictures are the same, and at that time they were rejected by the public, whereas today they are enthusiastically acclaimed.

This is one evidence of what we said earlier—that an appreciation, and understanding, of art is far more widespread today than ever before in history.

It is evidence that today's art public has a sufficient grasp of the artist's methods and objectives to understand that a picture can be a valid statement, even though it does not give a photograph-like representation of a person or scene.

MUCH of this readiness to understand and appreciate has come about unconsciously, and through constant exposure to the work of "modern" artists, not only in painting and sculpture, but in the design of everyday objects, even in today's advertising, which has made a much greater use of non-objective art in recent years.

But whatever the causes, it is a fact that an ever-larger segment of the public today is willing to investigate, to study, to see and enjoy works of modern painters and sculptors.

Van Gogh is not as far out in left field as some of the modern painters, but some of his works, particularly later in his painting career, are sufficiently non-objective to cause puzzlement to the traditionalist.

The fact that thousands upon thousands of people do not let this bother them is impressive evidence that art today is "getting through" to an ever-larger number of people.—E.A.

Dennis the Menace



"WHAT HAPPENED? I LIKED THE BROWN COAT, YOU LIKED THE BROWN COAT... HOW COME YA GOT THE BLUE COAT?"

Communications

Letters to the Editor must bear the name and address of the writer, although under certain circumstances the use of a pen name or initial for publication is permissible. The Mail Tribune reserves the right to edit all letters with a view to clarification and condensation. Letters submitted for publication must not exceed 400 words. The letters printed in this column do not necessarily represent the views of the paper; in fact the contrary is often the case.

A Dime Worth a Million

To the Editor: Riddle... You were born with it. The less of it you have the more it is worth: if it gets away you may not get it back: what is it???

Your health. Just your health. A dime given to the March of Dimes may be the answer to your keeping your health, and certainly your health is worth a million dollars to you, or even more to your loved ones.

It is a plain fact that through the March of Dimes of the past years, the dreaded polio has almost been defeated. Also out of the test tubes and countless experiments conducted through the March of Dimes many other important medical aids have been found and improved.

Various treatments have been found to assist medical science in bringing back to health diseased, afflicted, and injured human beings by your March of Dimes that would have not been possible otherwise.

The Salk vaccine shots for my children came too late for me. I contracted polio in 1935. But look at the diseases which still take a terrible toll of healthy people year after year. Virus disease take many lives and many people's health each year. The March of Dimes is now going to undertake finding of the answer with your help. One thin dime? Arthritis cripples and handicaps many people not just temporarily but for life, and I know of no disease which can let a humor being live so long and suffer so much.

Your March of Dimes is going to undertake the finding of the answer. What causes birth defects? Will your unborn children suffer from a birth defect? How about the children of the future? Your March of Dimes is undertaking the task of finding the answer. Maybe the March of Dimes will provide the help for you tomorrow that you don't need today. Illness and health are two sides in a war that knows no end, and a war which exempts no one, not even you.

Thousands of dedicated people are pledging their lives to finding the answers and certainly those answers are worth giving a dime's worth of help for perhaps a million dollars worth of health.

Bruce R. Sexton, Chairman, Medford Active Club participation in March of Dimes.

Unlicensed Dogs

To the Editor: After reading several letters on dog control and dog problems, especially your Sunday and Monday editions, I would like to tell of a problem I had.

On several occasions a boy in my neighborhood brought his unlicensed dog in my yard and kicked him on my licensed dog, which was very securely tied up. After my son and I both had talked to the boy and he ignored our request to stay out of our yard, I called the city police. They referred me to the Humane Society officer. He in turn referred me to the man at the dog pound. After three phone calls he promised to investigate. After two calls made in person to the pound, I was told he was away deer hunting and I would have to wait until he returned.

That was in October of 1958. This is January 1959. To this day I have never been contacted by him. He was given my home address, also the phone number where I work. Strange as it may seem,

I could not be given help and advice on how to protect my dog so I could keep him, but I was given more than sufficient help in obtaining a new home for him by the Humane society officer.

The unlicensed dog I spoke of is still unlicensed and roaming the streets, fighting other dogs. One of your writers spoke of overturned garbage cans. I cook in a large restaurant in Talent. Every day when I go to work the garbage cans are turned and garbage scattered all over. I have seen several of the dogs and not a one has license.

Perhaps I sound bitter in my letter. The dog I gave away was a registered licensed 3-year-old male dog.

I sincerely hope that no one else in the city of Medford who has to work for a living as I do ever has the same discouraging experience I had. Won't someone please get on the ball and do something, not just write about it?

Audrey Robertson, 529 Edwards st., Medford.

Grounds for Divorce

To the Editor: This is to R. G., whose letter appeared in the Sunday paper.

Let me set you straight on the teachings of the Bible, if you are an authority which you should be to make a statement correcting and criticizing all of the ministers of all denominations. If you will read St. Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 32, you will find justified grounds for divorce. Not only does it give grounds because of fornication, but by any sense of decency and righteousness it would seem justifiably and reasonably because the marriage laws govern moral conduct and anyone guilty of committing fornication should be put away as so stated in the good book according to Christ's own words.

Gordon L. Logan, Route 4, Box 421A, Medford.

History in Dumps

To the Editor: With growing opposition to closure of the Camp White waste disposal dump, it seems there should be little wider study given it. As all of us sadly know, there is a fringe element who will not go to the trouble and distance south of Medford to dispose of their gunny-sacked household wastes. They will be found as they are used to be, dumped along out-of-way highway places, partly hidden pretty camping places and secluded forest areas. And mind you, this is not done by the getting-by element back of the railroad tracks.

A woman out Antelope way told me how people persisted, despite her no trespass signs, in dumping trash in her pasture field. She finally found a day-book of a Medford contractor who then had the ornery chore of cleaning up the whole pasture field. It is sad but true that this type of people are much like dogs, where one starts fouling up a flower-bed in someone's dooryard, it attracts others to do the same. There should be more waste dump grounds instead of less, each providing a living for an attendant there.

It surely is a headache, providing waste dumping grounds. Great mounds of it that nature has patiently dusted and grass-grown provide happy hunting ground for archeologists to dig into, reconstructing ways of life of bygone civilizations. An interesting and amusing angle was provided me many years ago

Italy Example of Confusing, Multi-Party Government; Stability Seen Long Way Off

By PHIL NEWSOM
UPI Foreign News Editor

The European usually professes a complete inability to understand American politics — the verbal fireworks immediately preceding an election, and the comparative peace that descends after the decision is reached.

But for a real lesson in political science and for some really mixed-up politics, let's take a look at Italy which at the moment is in the hands of a caretaker government.

In the Italian Chamber of Deputies are approximately a dozen political parties, ranging from extreme left to extreme right.

A strong and recognizable type are the Communists. They are the second largest party in the Chamber of Deputies, but are not represented in the government. Another group is the Liberals. But, instead of leaning left as the name might imply, they are conservatives.

Some Parties Split
Then there are the right-wing Socialists, who have participated in the government, and the left-wing Socialists who do not. These two originally were the same party, but split when the left formed an alignment with the

Communists. In the center are the Christian Democrats. They have been the governing party since World War II. But they also are split between right and left.

In between the major parties are others such as the Monarchists and Neo-Fascists, who have special interests, but in general lean left, and still others who chiefly represent language differences inside the country.

Out of all these divisions have grown the present difficulties wherein weeks may pass before a new government is able to take over and which may take years to solve.

Tied to West
Italy achieved a reputation for political stability, and tied itself closely to the West, during the eight years immediately following World War II, from 1945 to 1953. Then it was under the leadership of Alcide De Gasperi.

De Gasperi ruled the Christian Democratic Party with an iron hand and ran the government the same way, even though only once did he have an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies.

It was De Gasperi, incidentally, who crushed the Communist threat to take over the Italian government in 1948. But in 1953 De Gasperi and the Christian Democrats made a mistake. They rammed through a law which gave 65 per cent of all seats in the

Chamber of Deputies to the party winning 50.01 per cent of the votes in a general election. In the following election, they lost.

Uneasy Coalitions Formed
Shortly afterward, De Gasperi was forced to resign and a year later, died.

From that day forward, only uneasy coalitions ruled in Italy, none with the power really to rule and each able to last only a matter of months.

The last one, headed by Amintore Fanfani, one of Italy's most astute politicians, fell last Monday.

Hence the confusion. There are predictions that in subsequent shifts, two entirely new political blocs may emerge — both non-Communist, one of them "conservative" and the other "progressive." But they may be a long time in coming. Meanwhile, the Communists will be outside, waiting.

Washington Report

By WILLIAM S. WHITE

ONE MAN'S DECISION

Washington — A hard dilemma faces Congress and the country, and the Administration itself in a way, over the issue of President Eisenhower's military budget. And the unpleasant fact is that this dilemma cannot really be resolved.

The central and obvious question is whether in asking for some forty billions of dollars the President is asking enough. For at least in missiles, which may become the ultimate weapon, the Russians seem chillingly ahead of us.

But it is not possible for Congress and the country to find a rational answer to the big question without first answering another question. Here it is that the rub comes. This is the query:

How far may the professional military officers properly go in appealing to Congress over the heads of their civilian superiors, including the President himself as commander in chief, for higher military expenditures than these civilian superiors have decided upon?

NO ONE, not even the President himself, is absolutely sure. It is plain that the Secretary of Defense, Neil McElroy, is not entirely easy in his mind, either.

Thus members of "the brass" go one by one before Congressional committees carrying heavy and delicate burdens. These admirals and generals have a compelling need, and also a high responsibility, to fight for what they honestly believe their services require in a world of danger.

But, again, they have the plain constitutional duty to bow in the last analysis to the civilian authority. And, finally, they must think of themselves. They are aware that outright rebellion from the Administration's high defense policies may cost them their careers.

For Secretary McElroy has passed the word that while he wishes to weigh independent judgments with sympathy he will not stand for out-and-out disloyalty to the Administration's budget policy. Given all this, it is easy to understand why the eyes of high officers and their inflections of voice sometimes seem to speak these days before Congressional committees rather louder than the words actually uttered in support of the budget. For where does independent judgment stop and disloyalty begin?

THIS is the situation:

1. The Administration at the top (that is, the President and his chief civilian advisers) is satisfied that the budget is enough to maintain a "reasonable" margin of safety.

2. The professional officers, by and large, are by no means so satisfied — though it is fair to add that they almost never are.

3. Congress itself simply

does not know whether to feel satisfied or not. Congress does not know precisely what "reasonable" safety means. And when Congress does not know, the public cannot know.

Though believing itself to be right about the budget, the Administration nevertheless is not happy to seem to be muzzling the officers or imperiously shutting off public debate. But, again, it feels — and quite properly, in this correspondent's opinion — that it simply cannot allow the uniformed men to seem to challenge civilian control of the military. That is the way, if pursued long enough, to dictatorship. The constitutional system requires that the civilian leadership have the very last word — even if that last word be terribly wrong.

CONGRESS, on its side, feels cut off from the genuine opinions of the military professionals. Its members know they need more information. But its most responsible members know, too, that there is great peril in encouraging the uniformed men to buck civilian authority and "tell all" to Congressional committees.

What is the outlook, then? It is simply that there will not be, and cannot be, any really searching great national debate of the sort that would seem to be objectively needed. Indeed, the fact must be faced that in the nature of the present world Congress, at any rate, can no longer really exercise its old power over the military purse. The Pentagon is able to put hush-hush over its operations, an ugly necessity but a necessity nevertheless.

So the sum of it all is this: if the President is wrong, we are all in a very bad way. For in all the circumstances only a single man, the President, can, effectively and at last, determine what the military budget is going to be. (Copyright, 1959, by United Feature Syndicate, Inc.)

Today
In Oregon History
(A Centennial Feature)

JANUARY 30, 1921
It was announced today that Oregon will have eight delegates at the convention of the national woman's party to be held in Washington, Feb. 15 to 18. The principal purpose of the convention is the adoption of a future program now that equal suffrage has been won. While nothing is yet known of the nature of the proposed program there is worried speculation in male circles that the ladies, not content with simple equality, want something more.

PLAN OIL PIPELINE
Rome — (UPI) — Italy has announced plans to construct a big pipeline system to funnel oil imports to Switzerland from the port of Genoa. Officials said today the project will sharply reduce land shipment costs for oil needed by land-locked Switzerland.

Try and Stop Me

By BENNETT CERF

A STOCK BROKER with very questionable ethics talked an uninitiated sucker into buying five thousand shares of a phony oil stock at 50 cents a share.

A week later the broker reported, "You're lucky! That stock just doubled in price!" "Buy me another five thousand," ordered the sucker.

A few days later the broker was on the phone again. "That stock's going wild," he exulted. "It just hit \$2 a share!"

"That's enough for me," decided the sucker. "Sell all I've got at the market price." "Sell!" echoed the broker in amazement. "To whom?"

An agent was trying to persuade a night club impresario to give his new client a break. "Why, she's another Marilyn Monroe," he said—then felt constrained to add, "She don't look like her, I admit—but you ought to see how she reads Dostoyevsky!"
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