

THE SHAPE OF THINGS

Art History Dull Stuff, Methodically Compiled

By RICHARD HIRSCH
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Art history is dull. By a conspiracy of snobbery nobody dares hint at the extent of this extraordinary tedium. But the fact remains. It might, some day, be found healthy to acknowledge it: Art history, as one remembers it from college, is dull.

The exceptions are provided by the rare teacher and the rarer author who considers that art history is the record of the evolution of the ideas of man and, hence, lively in the deepest way.

Those are the exceptions. The general rule is quite something else. The general rule includes the survey of "periods" or how to distinguish a cathedral from a pyramid or a Courbet from a van Eyck. It also includes the treatises devoted to a given

artist where the shreds of living fact are drowned in a morass of footnotes as far as the eye can reach.

Art Deserves Better

This is dull stuff, methodically compiled to be as indigestible as possible. With all due respect to the historical "method," art and the artist deserve better than this.

For the work of art is not a scientific specimen which some artist, long dead, contrived in order to exercise the sleuthing talent of a later historian. Sometimes one might not suspect this obvious fact.

Bernard Berenson perfected the techniques and the intuitive approaches by which a given painting is identified as the work of a given painter. Writing at the end of his life, he had harsh words for the people he called the "attributors" although he had been the foremost among them for

many years. His reason was that he ultimately discerned just how far the writings of the "attributors" sterilized the quest for beauty on the part of the beholder.

Certainly, the art historian adds to our knowledge and dispels the fog of error and misnomers by which, for so long, much of our art heritage had been surrounded. For example, not so many years ago, the greater "names" of Italian painting were to be found loosely given to hundreds of paintings which these artists could never have had worked to paint if they had worked 24 hours a day.

Fall Into Trap

This was senseless. In correcting these hundreds of false attributions, however, many art historians fell into the trap of "method" for its own sake. They developed a language that makes a chem-

ical patent application read like a Shakespeare sonnet. They also took to dissecting any obscure little work they could find as if it were a laboratory specimen.

This is dull. Worse, it makes the pursuit of some knowledge of art by the non-specialist seem a dusty undertaking remote from the values, the purpose and the undying meaning of past art.

Quite simply, the picture and the artist die in the process of being anatomized. A fold of drapery is shown to be a borrowing from some other master; the droop of some trees is shown to be a Venetian invention, appropriated by the artist; the twist of a body was stolen from Leonardo; the perspective in depth repeats something from someone else — and so on.

Fine For Training

This is fine if you are training to work professionally in a museum. It is also fine when you already have your taste fully formed and are in active search of information to perfect it further.

But what of the poor college student who gets the idea, from some assigned reading, that the artist of the past can only be handled as a dead butterfly in the hands of a naturalist. When the great Masters reveal themselves to the student through dusty tomes loaded with footnotes, what they have done and what they were loses its very essence.

Lorenzo Lotto is a good example of this. Battles of words have raged about the man and his work, not at all because of his importance but because, once upon a time, someone unearthed the fact that he was poorly known and yet a fine painter.

Books were written to show who, among the Venetians of the early sixteenth century, must have been his teachers. No document shows this. So the field was wide open for the men with the magnifying glasses. Other books were written and articles and pamphlets to prove who had not been his teachers.

Torn To Shreds

Thus stimulated, the writers look on the works of his m a t u r e l y, metaphorically tearing them to shreds. Every inch of his works was examined to find out who had inspired Lotto to paint as he did. Reading the literature on robust Lorenzo Lotto, his personality disappears totally, diluted in such a catalogue of borrowings that one loses all patience with him. But is this accurate?

No thinker has ever produced a new thought. We ascribe genius to him because he combined commonplace notions in a new way, because he took ideas that were "in the air" and defined them strikingly. In just this way, no painter has ever been "original." His originality has always been and could only be to say something old or something current in his own distinctive way.

Your ability to read this article is something which you have borrowed from your first grade teacher. Your last letter was a patchwork of borrowings from things read, things heard and those experiences which you have combined into a personality which you insist, is your own.

Could Not Question It

And son with Lorenzo Lotto to when he sat himself down at an easel in his hometown of Bergamo. Before him is a blank canvas. He intends to paint a Saint Jerome in Penitence. He paints it. When he has finished, he likes it. He even likes his funny lion, though, clearly, he has never seen a lion. He likes it because it says what he wanted to say. It is said in his way. He could not question that nor, perhaps, should we.

For Lorenzo Lotto, in 1515,



GREAT CHARM — Saint Jerome Penitent, painted in 1515 by Lorenzo Lotto upon his return to his home town of Bergamo, Italy. In spite of what the historians have done to the artist, there is great charm and satisfaction to be derived from this small work. (Courtesy the Samuel H. Kress Memorial Collection, Allentown Art Museum)

The Family Council

Editor's Note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, three editors and a women's editor. Each article is a summary of an actual case history. The Council reports on problems that have been dealt with by responsible agencies and counselors. (Copyright 1961—General Features Corp.)

Frances P. — My husband keeps piling work on me.

Timothy P. — She has the boys home to help her.

Frances P. — We live in a rural community and I'm used to hard work. But it's never been as bad as now. The strain led me to a heart attack and I'm not supposed to get upset or do heavy work for the next three months. But who'll do it?

Tim drinks, so in order to be sure of cash in the house I held an outside job for eight years, until I got sick. I also must tend the coal fires and take care of Tim's 82-year-old mother. We have two sons at home, one 17 who'd like to join the Navy, another 19 who wants to take an outside job. But my husband expects them to stay home to help me with the house, wait on his mother and do the heavy chores. This doesn't sound fair to them.

The goal-grabber is that my mother-in-law is in good health and can wait on herself. But with the boys around, she won't budge. She pays no keep because her check is only \$36 a month, and I'm even having trouble claiming her as an income tax exemption. She has a daughter she could live with, but they don't want her there because she makes trouble. I want my husband and his

mother to pitch in more.

Timothy P. — My wife just wants to sound like a heroine. I help her with the heavy work most of the time. I admit I go overboard with a bottle once in a while, but I make up for it. And I hand over money to her too, after I put in a day's work at the gas station.

As for my mother, she's a quiet old gal who wouldn't hurt a fly. But my sister doesn't act right toward her, so I took her in to make her last years as happy as possible. She can be as funny as a barrel of monkeys and the boys like having her around, especially with their mother away on a job or an errand.

Our younger boy can join the Navy if he wants, but the older one seems contented the way things are. He works part-time at the post office, then does a few home chores and looks out for Grandma. If my wife can't do the coal stove, she can always ask him or me.

But I think she's just money-mad. She wants money from me, from my mother, from the boys, and from her own job, too. And an exemption from my mother's care. Maybe I drink too much, but maybe she's driving me to it.

The Council:—The P. household seems to be dedicated to the buck, with the accent on passing it rather than earning it.

For Mrs. P. it's like a game of musical chairs where she's the one left over when the music stops. She'd like to stop the game and bring a few other members of the family to their feet.

As a start we suggest that the local family service association be invited by Mrs. P. to decide what fixed duties be assigned to whom. Carrying out individual responsibilities would be the "ticket" for enjoying family membership.

The kingpin here should be Mr. P. but, due to his irresponsibility and shirking of his role, all the other roles are knocked off base. We agree with Mrs. P. that the boys should be released to make their own way instead of serving as flunkies to fill in the blanks left by Dad, Mom and Grandma — who can all handle those blanks themselves if pinned down.

There are limits to which a plucky woman like Mrs. P. can go to hold a shiftless bunch together. Mrs. P. has just about reached those limits.

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One Injured In Accident Thursday

One person suffered minor injuries in one of two auto accidents reported Thursday, according to state police.

Clarence Lee Ticer, route 1, box 236, Eagle Point, was treated at the Shady Cove Clinic for cuts and bruises and released, police said.

Ticer was struck by a van-type truck driven by Stewart Forbes, 71, of 40 North Peach st., when Forbes attempted to back his truck to a ditch near Shady Cove to pull out Ticer's pickup truck, police said.

David Rowell Colby, 59, of 407 Normal st., Ashland, escaped injury when his car skidded on Highway 99 on Thursday morning and turned over on its side. The accident occurred by the Southern Oregon Nursery, officers said.

Forester Discusses Timber Tax Problem

The legislative interim tax committee turned its back on Oregon's tree farmers, who manage 4.2 million acres of the state's private taxpaying forests, when it failed to offer a solution to the timber tax problem," Paul F. Liniger, forester, Industrial Forestry association, Portland, told the Siskiyou Chapter, Society of American Foresters, here Friday.

Liniger said that growing and harvesting trees and manufacturing forest products provides 60 per cent of Oregon's basic economy by bringing in \$1.3 billion annually.

The forester said that IFA has proposed a taxation system for western Oregon's private timber which would fairly support county government and allow tree farmers to grow their trees the 60 to 80 years required for harvest.

Earned Annually

Liniger said the real timber tax base was not just the trees, but the \$450 million earned annually by Oregon's 85,000 forest industry workers. The taxes they pay on their homes, incomes, and gasoline all support schools, roads and all other state and county functions. Their income also goes for fishing and hunting licenses which pay for management of Oregon's wildlife, he said.

"The most beautiful part about these jobs and their many benefits to Oregon is their permanence, if we continue to grow trees on our tree farms," he said.

PICKETS MARCH

Chapel Hill, N.C. — (UPI) — White and Negro pickets marched in front of the Carolina theater Friday night to protest the management's refusal to desegregate the theater for a showing of "Porgy and Bess," the all-Negro movie about Negro life in Charleston, S.C.

has never heard of a museum and he was not working to get his painting exhibited in one. Across the centuries we hear his statement quite clearly. Across the centuries, if we close our ears to the battles of words built up around his life and work, we sense his charm, enjoy his color, perceive many ideas of his time and fall under his agreeable spell.

Was it not for this that he studied and worked? And, if he succeeded in giving an eloquence to his Renaissance world and his work has endured, should we not thank him for his ability to borrow from the world and transmit some of its throbbing liveliness to us?

Art history should not obscure this.

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HOW CHRISTIAN SCIENCE HEALS

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San Juan, P.R. — Puerto Rico with 544 persons per square mile is about 4,000 times more densely populated than Alaska.

New York — The 27.5 million U.S. mission headquarters for the United Nations was dedicated Friday by Ambassador James Wadsworth. The 12-story, modernistic building, which is the only U.S. Embassy office building in the United States, is located directly across from the United Nations in Manhattan.

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United States Bonds		2,293,863.19
Municipal Bonds and Warrants		418,114.19
Banking House, Fixtures and Equipment		96,044.43
Cash and Due From Banks		1,355,399.80
Stock in Federal Reserve Bank		8,400.00
TOTAL		\$6,389,105.15

LIABILITIES		
Capital Stock		\$ 150,000.00
Surplus		130,000.00
Undivided Profits		43,633.46
DEPOSITS		6,022,433.09
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