

ART FRONT

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JUNE • JULY



**ARTISTS-
STOP
THOSE
CUTS!**

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION NOTES

Baltimore

With the possible exception of Minnesota, the Baltimore Artists Union has the largest and broadest cultural program in the entire national organization. Recent developments show a steady growth in the direction of making the union a real cultural force in the community. Its practice of exhibiting in trade union halls has already been commented on in the organization columns. That the Union is keeping the rental issue alive is attested to by the following excerpts from a letter received from the Secretary of the Museum Board:

"At the last meeting of the Board . . . it was agreed that measures must be taken to circumvent the present economic plight of the artist, and the Museum wishes to assist in every degree to find a market for his productions. . . . It is our opinion that an organized effort by the Museum and other art organizations in Baltimore to promote a market for art is not only desirable, but possible, and the Museum is ready to cooperate in any way to further this end."

The Union's well-traveled graphic exhibition is still much in demand with the I.L.G.W.U. and Finnish Hall bidding for it when it closes at the Polish Hall.

Philadelphia

Taking advantage of the procedure outlined in the Wagner Act, the Union is attempting to clear up a bad situation of long standing on the Art Projects of Philadelphia.

The Union has placed the following demands before the local and Federal administration:

1. That the Artists Union, section of the W.P.A., be recognized as the bargaining agency for artists on projects in the Philadelphia district.
2. That a regular weekly meeting of the Artists Union, W.P.A. section, be arranged with the local art project administrator at which time grievances and proposals are to be heard.
3. Placement of artists on those projects with which they are most compatible.
4. That quality of art worker rather than quantity be the goal of the projects.
5. That the Federal Art ruling causing a worker to be fired if absent from work for more than five days, even though due to illness, be rescinded at once.

Continual violation of the fundamental rights of employees working under her, combined with lack of cooperation with community agencies to best utilize the facilities of the Art Project, have compelled the Union to demand the removal of Mrs. Curran, local Federal Art Project Director.

At a closed hearing, ninety pages of testimony were taken substantiating charges made by the Union. Although the meeting was held by the Philadelphia Union, many non-Union members appeared to testify. Dr. Barnes, of the Barnes Foundation, appeared at the meeting to urge removal of Mrs. Curran. Mr. Parker attended the meeting as an observer representing the Washington administration. The charges, along with the testimony, will be forwarded to Washington with a demand for the removal of Mrs. Curran.

Chicago

A situation similar to that in Philadelphia exists in Chicago. The Director of the Federal Art Project in Chicago, Increase Robinson, has stubbornly refused to comply with procedure established in Washington regulating labor relations.

She has manifested such a strong anti-Union bias that redress of grievances of the artists working under her has become impossible.

C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

To the Editors of ART FRONT:

The review of George Plekhanov's *Art and Society* in the May ART FRONT calls for comment. Reviewer Mr. Phillips has not only grievously distorted Plekhanov's acute analysis of the relation between social forces and art, but he has brought into question the whole functional or "utilitarian" value of art, in particular, of revolutionary art; and this in the name of Marxism!

It is essential to examine the nature of Mr. Phillips' confusion. Surely art must be regarded either as an end in itself or in some sense as useful, and, we may suppose, socially useful. In what sense, then, is art socially useful? Not, certainly, in the sense of the "consumer-philosophy" which Mr. Phillips wrongly imputes to Plekhanov. Plekhanov defines the utilitarian view as the tendency to regard works of art as "judgments on the phenomena of life," judgments which, simply because they are such, act as a social force, and act, we may add, in direct relation to the artistic merit of the works in which they are embodied. That the kind of judgment rendered, the nature of the ideas expressed, has a definite relation to artistic merit is unquestionable. Plekhanov, who was writing, it should be remembered, in the first decade of the century, is rather suggestive than definitive in his attempt to analyze this relation. His purpose, however, in the essays under review, was not primarily to discuss the many problems connected with evaluation of artistic merit. He was primarily concerned to determine the kind of relation which does in fact exist between social conditions and the subject-matter and theory of art. The fundamental validity of his conclusions, despite certain ambiguities in formulation, has not yet been superseded. We can agree with Mr. Phillips, and Plekhanov says nothing to the contrary, that the unimaginative preaching called didacticism has no place in art. The function of art is not to give either moral or political formulae, but through the aesthetic presentation of experience "to further the development of human consciousness." Mr. Phillips, we surmise, would not admit that he is an advocate of art for art's sake, if only for the reason that at the present historical juncture the theory is too patently useful to the bourgeoisie. But what Mr. Phillips does advocate remains buried darkly behind unmoored terms such as "value judgments" and "special vision" of the artist.

"Are we to assume that a revolutionary art is to be utilitarian?" Mr. Phillips asks the question with rhetorical incredulity. Yet since there has never been a significant art that was not utilitarian in the proper sense of that word applied to art, we may answer Mr. Phillips, his misused quotation from Marx notwithstanding: By all means let us have a revolutionary art which is useful to the revolution, an art which will in Lenin's words "become a part of the general cause of the proletariat." This, Mr. Phillips' insidious distinction to the contrary, is the spirit and also the letter of Marxism.

Katherine Ellis
James Grunbaum.

To the Editors of ART FRONT

By failing to cite instances of "distortion" in my review, Miss Ellis and Mr. Grunbaum seem to imply that they are self-evident. They merely assert that Plekhanov's analysis of the relation between art and society is "acute," without so much as referring to the vast number of specific ideas and general principles in the essays. Surely, as Marxists, they cannot believe in the infallibility of Plekhanov; nor can they believe that all the problems of Marxist criticism have been solved for all time. That Plekhanov did contribute much to the Marxist study of art is, of course, undeniable, and I might remind Miss Ellis and Mr. Grunbaum that the first half of my review is a summary of this contribution.

On the question of Utilitarianism, I assume that anyone who considered himself a Marxist was aware that the theory of utilitarianism, whether in art or philosophy, is alien to Marxism. (And the quotation from Marx, notwithstanding the charge of "misuse," is taken from an extended attack on Bentham's philosophy of utility.) I was more interested in showing how Plekhanov's almost complete absorption in the *sociology of art* led him to an esthetic of utility, and how this, in turn, involved him in all kinds of contradictions and distortions of the nature of art. The history of art is one long refutation of Plekhanov's dictum that "when a work of art is based upon a fallacious idea, inherent contradictions cause a degeneration of its esthetic quality." Are not the works of Dostoyevski and Proust and Cezanne based on socially fallacious ideas?—fallacious, that is, from the standpoint of Marxism. Read Marx on Balzac or on Greek art, and you get the answer to this low. In fact, Plekhanov's own remarks on the French romantics (mentioned in my review) contradict his equation of esthetic quality with immediate social meaning. Similarly, Miss Ellis and Mr. Grunbaum would have to rewrite the history of literature in order to prove their dogmatic assertion that "there has never been a significant art that was not utilitarian in the proper sense of that word applied to art." If space permitted one might examine the distinction between the idea that art has social value—or that it can be put to social uses—and the notion that all art must be utilitarian. Unfortunately, Miss Ellis and Mr. Grunbaum confuse these two ideas: when they emphasize the first no Marxist could quarrel with them, but when they shift into the idea of utilitarianism they come close to the sectarian esthetic of Upton Sinclair.

I should like to point out that Miss Ellis and Mr. Grunbaum misinterpret the only statement they seem to approve in my review. I did not say that "didacticism has no place in art"; obviously, there have been many important didactic works. What I did say is that an entire art cannot be compressed into the genre of didacticism. It is ironic that those who defend a utilitarian view of art should at the same time be so unalterably opposed to didacticism.

William Phillips.

of the art projects, the Public Use of Art Committee is an effective lever which swings over to our side ever new sections of the people, by the simple fact of making them aware of their own needs and interests, of their own hitherto dormant capacity for art appreciation and enjoyment. What we want is a culture which does not equivocally exist in a precious atmosphere but one which penetrates into the everyday life of our society. This coincides with the requirements of the largest number of people, for only then can the laboring masses assimilate and become an integral part of the cultural life of the country.

All artists solidly behind the program of the Public Use of Art Committee.

Easel and graphic artists—ten of your fellow artists have gone as an organized body to their supervisors and demanded that he cooperate by assigning them to do pictures of the New York subway for a proposed exhibition at the Transport Workers Union. This request was granted.

Follow this excellent example—organize in groups, develop plans, place your proposals before your supervisor, begin to fulfill the requests for exhibitions from the Pullman Car Porters Union, Locals of the I.L.G.W.U., Bricklayers Locals, etc. We are

going in the right direction. This is our fight on the cultural front.

The Public Use of Art Committee is planning an exhibition of murals and sculpture for the subways, which will prove the practicability of its program for expansion. This is one of the most serious steps undertaken by our committee. It demands from you equally serious work. Make your contribution to this exhibit your finest effort. It is through steps of such a nature that we make felt our central demands: EXPANSION, PERMANENCE OF THE PROJECT.

Some Letters Received by the Committee

Resolution on the Development of Federal W.P.A. Cultural and Educational Projects into a Federal Department of Cultural-Educational Work, Passed Unanimously by the Board of Directors of the National Federation of Settlements.

The Board of Directors of the National Federation of Settlements herewith registers its conviction that public unemployment relief in the form of wages for work socially useful is the outstanding contribution of the past four years in meeting the horrors of economic catastrophe. The use of the services of a proportion of unemployed men and women to safeguard and improve the conditions of life of those working class families hardest hit by the depression is one of the finest aspects of work relief. The building of roads and other large scale improvements which bring ease and pleasure to possessing groups not critically affected by the depression would have been piling injustice upon injustice. That unemployed have been set to create public playgrounds, parks and housing in working-class areas has been real gain.

The allocation of the service of a considerable number of unemployed professional people and artists to neighborhoods in which the unemployed live is to this Board a particularly sound principle. Settlement workers know, as a result of fifty years of service spent in depressed areas in different parts of the United States, that such localities are pitifully understaffed in the fields of medicine, nursing, recreation direction and leadership in music, art and handicraft, dance, drama, literature, science and economics and social meetings.

Before the depression settlements had brought into being in widely scattered localities across the country a number of significant cultural institutions, i.e., music schools, art schools and exhibition rooms, little theatres, dance studios, gymnasium and athletic centers, educational centers in which young people and adults met for study, discussion and social recreation. Enterprises such as these ministered to considerable minorities. Their essential purpose was to serve as models for public action. They indicate what public educational-cultural institutions the public authorities could and should provide.

The lot of vast numbers of people living in tenement areas under home and work relief, supplemented by the new educational and cultural opportunities provided by Federal, State and city cultural projects, is markedly better than it was in the boom days of the late 1920's. The splendid

human results already apparent from beginnings made in the fields of slum clearance, housing and government support of education and recreation have demonstrated beyond any doubt that it is vitally important for the nation to take a hand in stimulating local communities to move more rapidly in these directions.

This Board believes that when the gains of the past four years are properly evaluated the contribution made by the Federal cultural projects will be found to be among the most significant, lasting and productive.

Settlements welcome every sign that the depression is passing. But they would like to see national and state departments of cultural education established to consolidate the gains made during the past four years. There seems little possibility that even the most competent W.P.A. artists, musicians, dancers, actors and recreational leaders, many of whom have acquired valuable skill during their depression service, now serving in settlements and public institutions, can at this time find places in private schools or in industry. Artists and educators must be assured certainty in their employment of at least a year or two if their service is to be of good quality. The members of this Board are quite aware that there are great differences in the quality of the work done in the above fields in different parts of the country. But their experience shows that with proper administrative safeguards, a sound and advancing scheme to raise the level of the cultural life of the nation can be devised and put into operation.

We therefore urge the Federal government to allocate monies to be used as grants in aid to continue to employ teachers and practitioners of the arts, education and recreation of high competence. The work of such leaders should be administered by persons of undoubted accomplishment and standing in their fields. This staff should have the assistance of unpaid advisory boards of professional leaders, one of whose duties should be to help devise programs to improve the conditions of life in working class areas and to discover and bring out the native powers of our children and youth. We urge especially that those practitioners and administrators of undoubted capacity developed under W.P.A. be held together and used as a nucleus for such a national department. We further suggest that relief authorities be instructed to find employment in other fields or to provide relief for those incompetent persons who have been included in artistic projects because their need demanded that relief be found for them.

This Board hereby places on record its opinion that a relapse into the cultural barrenness of 1930 after what has been accomplished since 1933 would be one of the tragedies of the unemployment debacle.

Helen Hall, New York,
President.

Excerpts from address of Robert Kohn, former head of National Housing Commission, and president of American Association of Architects, at preview and dinner arranged by Visual Arts Committee of United Neighborhood Houses, Inc., Monday evening, May 10, at University Settlement, 184 Eldridge Street.

How can we help to keep alive the impulse given to widespread training in design, made possible by the work relief activities of W.P.A. during the last few years? If it is true that prosperity is rapidly overtaking us, does that mean that we will no longer be able to afford the "extravagance" of offering training to ordinary every-day people in line, form, color, music, drama, organized play and the dance? Must all of us work to maintain the depression at its deepest in order not to lose for all time the invaluable impulse given to the spread of the seeds of culture in the larger community where alone it can grow? It seems as if we were faced by an absurd paradox. When we thought we were very poor we were richer than ever before in opportunities for the evocation of new talents, and now that we are told we are rapidly achieving prosperity, we see ourselves drifting back into the intellectual poverty of the isolated, unreal and undemocratic "preciousness" of ART. Must we repeat the experience of post-war days? Then almost every cooperative educational effort initiated for and justified in the name of war-time emergency was, almost shamefacedly, abandoned. That same enthusiasm (some of it bred of fear) was back of certain precious depression activities and we will have an even greater difficulty to distinguish and affirm the valuable from the emergency improvisations because of the idiotic catchword, "Boondoggling," indiscriminately applied to every kind of relief that was not pick and shovel ditch-digging. And back of this cheap sneer at everything in relief work which had in

(Continued on page 17)

The Negro Artist and Racial Bias

By JAMES A. PORTER

THE relatively late prominence of the Negro artist in American artistic events has stimulated curiosity about his origins, his heritage, and his future. Most of the curiosity has been directed upon his future. Arguments have ensued, and champions have risen to defend one side or the other of the central question concerned in the Negro artist's future. For example, the value of African Negro art to the American Negro artist has now, as an argument, almost reached the proportions of a *cause celebre*. A number of critics, artists, and laymen have stated their opinions about it in print; and the discussion still goes on more or less warmly in the studios, exhibition and lecture halls.

Dr. Alain Leroy Locke's recent pamphlet, *Negro Art: Past and Present*,* is intended to bolster his already wide reputation as a champion of Africanism in Negro art. This little pamphlet, just off the press, is one of the greatest dangers to the Negro artist to arise in recent years. It contains a narrow racialist point of view, presented in seductive language, and with all the presumption that is characteristic of the American "gate-crasher." Dr. Locke supports the defeatist philosophy of the "Segregationist." A segregated mind, he implies, is only the natural accompaniment of a segregated body. Weakly, he has yielded to the insistence of the white segregationist that there are inescapable internal differences between white and black, so general that they cannot be defined, so particular that they cannot be reduced through rational investigation.

The fundamental question in this controversy is of a two-fold character: What may constitute a distinctive contribution by the American Negro artist to American culture? And could it have been made prior to the advent of the so-called Negro Renaissance? Those who have taken the racialist point of view maintain that no truly distinctive contribution was made by the Negro to world culture prior to the re-discovery of African Negro art by certain European artists and critics of art. Secondly, they insist that by distinctiveness is meant the resemblance of painting or sculp-

ture by Negroes to African art forms or to the more or less abstract patterns made by the Cubists and their successors. The Negro artist, they declare, should bear in mind his "inherent dependency" upon African art forms.

It is possible to understand how a critic who has chosen to place the genesis of the Negro's cultural contribution in the first twenty-five years of this century could ignore all that had been accomplished by the Negro on American soil in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. It is possible to understand his indifference to the small but genuine achievement of the many early American Negroes whose legacy extends the blackman's cultural history back into the Eighteenth century. There were, for example, Negro craftsmen and artists who, had they white skins, would have been received by the irascible John Trumbull into the first National Academy of Design. Freed of his racial prejudice, William Dunlap would have written something concerning the early black as well as the early white craftsmen and artists. What does it mean to the racialist that Gilbert Stuart received his first lesson in drawing from a Negro slave? Or that Nelson A. Primus painted white subjects as successfully as he did black? Does he know that Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York sat to a black man for his portrait? Voluntarily wearing "blinkers," he shuts out from view the long procession of artists and writers whose work in sum represents a brilliant introduction to the Negro Renaissance,—artists like Reason, Smith, Douglass, Duncanson, Simpson, Chaplin, Dorsey, Bowser, Edmonia Lewis, Harper, Tanner, Brown and many others. The writers we have not space to mention.

We shall not have gained a true perspective of the position of the early Negro artist until we have realized how closely bound up were his activities with the great social questions that racked the American conscience in the Nineteenth century. The question of slavery with its corollaries, colonization and abolition, employed the talents of Negro artists as well as writers. Indeed, Negro historians have not canvassed the question thoroughly until they show this among other dynamic elements that motivated the anti-slavery move-

ment. Furthermore, it is a mistake on the part of the racialists to look back upon the cultural aspirations of the first free Negroes as evidence of class privilege. On the contrary, such aspirations amounted to a bold assertion of freedom, a protest against the shackles of slavery or the opprobrium attaching to membership in a despised race. Even though their art and literature were surcharged with propaganda they represented the conviction of truth over against a hell of prejudice.

Another serious error of the segregationists is their disbelief in the native (non-professional) craft arts or in the Negro spirituals as aspects of culture. In other words, we have here a perpetuation of the idea of spiritual separatism to an absurd degree. If the Negro spirituals are true only of a slave society they must be true of any similar group of people, similarly conditioned anywhere in the world. There are many reasons why these two categories of early production can be counted on the credit side of Negro cultural achievement. Assessed for aesthetic, social, and intrinsic racial values, they are found to contain generous proportions of each. Moreover, they contain these qualities in forms that are useful and inspirational to other races. Evidently the segregationists wish to deny the historical fact of incipient cultural movements among enslaved peoples. They forget that in ancient Rome the art of writing was the special province of the slave. They do not know that countless slaves have won in many periods and places, and under the most trying conditions of persecution, freedom, honor and respect through cultural achievement alone.

Another serious error which is made by the racialists is to urge the Negro artist to adopt the forms used by the African artist. The Negro artist who "adopts" such forms or imposes them upon his ideas and the objects that embody them gives birth to sterile art which will not have the crucial exigency that we associate with the arts of the African tribes. The "primitive" artist, whether African or Polynesian, is at one with the forms he uses because these are dictated by the society in which he finds himself, which in turn is modified by surrounding climatic and geographical conditions. To learn the truth of this one need

* Bronze Booklet No. 3. Published by the Associates in Negro Folk Education. P.O. Box 636, Ben Franklin Station, Washington, D.C.

only seek to establish the style-history of a given section of African art. It is then that the questions of material culture and of cultural necessity arise.

It has been clearly shown by reputable anthropologists that the belief that one race is fundamentally different in mind from another is baseless. If this is true, the special qualities of tribal art must result not from any unique racial character, but from influential phases within the particular culture from which it comes. Thus, Cubism is not merely the result of the impact of African forms upon European art-practice. Could Cubist art have been produced in Dahomey? From this evident impossibility it is clear that no common denominator exists within racial or territorial cultural activities unless it be that of common social, economic and political concerns upon a more or less uniform level of civilization.

Negro artists who have received the inspiration of African art in a purely formal way have failed to convince us that the resulting work is any better than American or European adaptations of Greek or Roman form-language. When they point indiscriminately to European artists who have been influenced by the African "discovery" they betray their lack of information. For by now it should be known that the most significant primitivistic artists made of their conduct toward problems of form an analogue of the creative process of which they postulated African art the result. So that Modigliani, Picasso, Brancusi and others sought to identify their emotional experience with objects of æsthetic character or objects amenable to a pervading conception of æsthetic surface. They did not merely imitate African forms. It is with genuine disappointment that the segregationist should observe that in each case the "primitivizing" artist had to rely upon academic techniques to define his objects clearly. The principle to be deduced from the foregoing is that the immobility of African forms cannot again become mobilized until it is identified with the very stuff of our existence.

In his book, *The New Negro*, Dr. Locke has asked that young Negro artists take as their model the American Taos group of artists of whom Walter Ufer was the leader. Their painting of the American Indian, he thought, represented the proper point of departure for the Negro. But he promptly turned to a Swedish draftsman who had a fair facility of hand at drawing romanticized versions of Mexicans, Laplanders and Norwegians, as the ideal person to adorn *The New Negro* with portraits of Negro leaders. Such an action represents an unfortunate inconsistency of policy; and it is not difficult to reconcile it with such a piece of self-effacement as the following

excerpt from the pamphlet above-mentioned:

"... A real and vital racialism in art is a sign of artistic objectivity and independence and gives evidence of a double emancipation from apologetic timidity and academic imitativeness..."

Which is followed by the unexplained contradiction:

"... In fact, except for closer psychological contact and understanding, the relation of the Negro artist to racial subject matter is not so very different from that of his white fellow artist to the same material..."

To dispose of the dependent question: what makes for a distinctive contribution of the Negro artist to American culture, we must note first of all that reasoning like the foregoing requires it to be socially exclusive, racially self-conscious, formal in style and content, and politically neutral. We have only to examine the work of the most sincere Negro artists now at work to find the refutation of these conclusions. For example, among the sculptors, the best are those who have been open-minded with regard to choice of subject-matter. They have insisted, at the same time, upon making up their own minds, and in so doing they have been able to learn a great deal

In Memoriam
Henry Ossawa Tanner
1859—1937

more about their *metier*. Elizabeth Prophet and Augusta Savage have, like Meta Warrick Fuller and May Howard Jackson before them, studied the psychological as well as the formal aspects of Negro illustration and interpretation. In addition to this they have tried to make their interpretations universal in value. It is as if in reply to suspicious questioning they had said, "Hath not a Negro senses? affections? passions?" Is he not subject to the same diseases, hurt with the same weapons and warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as his Anglo-Saxon brother? The presence among the Negro artists of such versatile as well as socially-minded individuals as Hale Woodruff, W. E. Scott, Charles Alston, Aaron Douglass, Henry Bannarn, Sargent Johnson, Lois M. Jones and James A. Porter is an indication of an anti-racialist front. These young people are impressed with the richness and the variety of life and the urgency of the material problems that they must solve. They will not cringe or be driven into a tight and unworthy little compartment of æsthetic production.

Finally, it is with hope that one contemplates the variety of the present interest manifested in Negro art. It is good that the artist is not totally preoccupied with the expression of vapid abstractions, or the imposing of a specious "Africanism" upon his art. One does not find a strictly "racial" artist anywhere. In the great cosmopolitan centers like New York he is more than a studio artist. There, one finds him making social cartoons, decorative sculpture; anecdotal subjects of wide commentary fall from his pen. He is a portrait painter and a sculptor of animals. He experiments with styles, and works conscientiously to found a style. In rural districts or in small ingrown communities like Charleston, South Carolina, one may find him preoccupied with landscapes, the suburban atmosphere. There he may be characteristically a painter of still life and in type a formalist painter with naive technical traits. A self-taught Negro sculptor in Richmond, Virginia, has attracted considerable notice through his direct and vivid carvings in wood, whose subjects are almost invariably stiltish women whom he has observed in the street. Without ever having seen the work of Gaston Lachaise he had hit upon precisely the same conception of form for which Lachaise had won wide acclaim. We may rely very largely upon individual and environmental factors to determine the nature of real contributions to American culture.



Bronze Head: CLARENCE LAWSON
Courtesy James A. Porter



Bust of *Madame de Maintenon* by *J. B. Carpeaux* (1868)

Prehistoric Rock Pictures

By CHARMION VON WIEGAND

WHILE the expansionist movement of imperialism in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries was occupied with the conquest of markets and colonies in the pre-industrialized sections of Asia and Africa, the same impulse in science was pushing back the then known boundaries of the physical universe and exploring ever further into the past history of mankind. Successive new archaeological discoveries greatly enlarged our perspective of the past. Pompei and Herculaneum disinterred gave us back the intimate luxuries of the Roman world; Schliemann taking his Iliad as literal truth conjured up the Homeric Age from the ruins of Troy and Mycenae. Egypt's mighty past was unrolled in a series of excavations lasting down to the present moment. But even further back there existed prehistoric man with no written records. The skeletons of the Neanderthal and Cro-Magnan man predicated a savage animal existence without any cultural activity.

In 1895, Europe was startled by the announcement that in the Altamira Caves in Spain, first opened in 1867, there existed animal paintings of wonderful artistry and that these were not products of some itinerant later artist but actual relics of a civilization that existed over 20,000 years ago. Scientists brought up on the Darwinian theory of evolution were immediately antagonistic, for here was no primitive or savage painting but highly coordinated artistic creation. These monumental bisons were not only on an artistic level with subsequent delineation of animal life but actually in some ways superior. Here was an art that used impressionist methods to portray the essential form that had mastered the rendition of muscular tension and organic vitality.

The theory of the time held that this great art of the Ice Age found in the French and Spanish caves had perished at the end of the glacial period. Certainly Neolithic art, formal and static in pattern, revealed no trace of its influence. But Leo Frobenius, a young student of anthropology, who was present when the letter of Riviere, the French discoverer of Altamira painting, was read before the Berlin Anthropological Society, refused to accept this theory. He could not believe that such a vital, highly developed art could perish so completely.

He recalled that Spain had once been part of Africa, which at the end of the Ice Age was a tropic land fertilized by a heavy rainfall from the melting of the glaciers. Perhaps in that flood period, prehistoric man had migrated from the Iberian peninsula southward and remains of his culture could be unearthed in Africa. Certain tribes of African bushmen still paint crude pictures on rocks. Might these not be the last living remnants of Ice Age culture? This scientific guess of Frobenius was the beginning of a long series of amazing discoveries.

The German-Inner-African Research Expedition organized by Frobenius sent out its first expedition in 1904. To date it has conducted over a dozen successive expeditions in Africa and in Europe on prehistoric sites. The story of these discoveries is closely related to Germany's imperialist thrust into Africa. But work did not stop even after the war and the German revolution. In 1923 the Research Institute for the Morphology of Civilization at Frankfurt-am-Main was founded. The present exhibition of prehistoric rock paintings at the Museum of Modern Art has been brought over from this institute's collection of over 35,000 facsimiles of prehistoric materials.

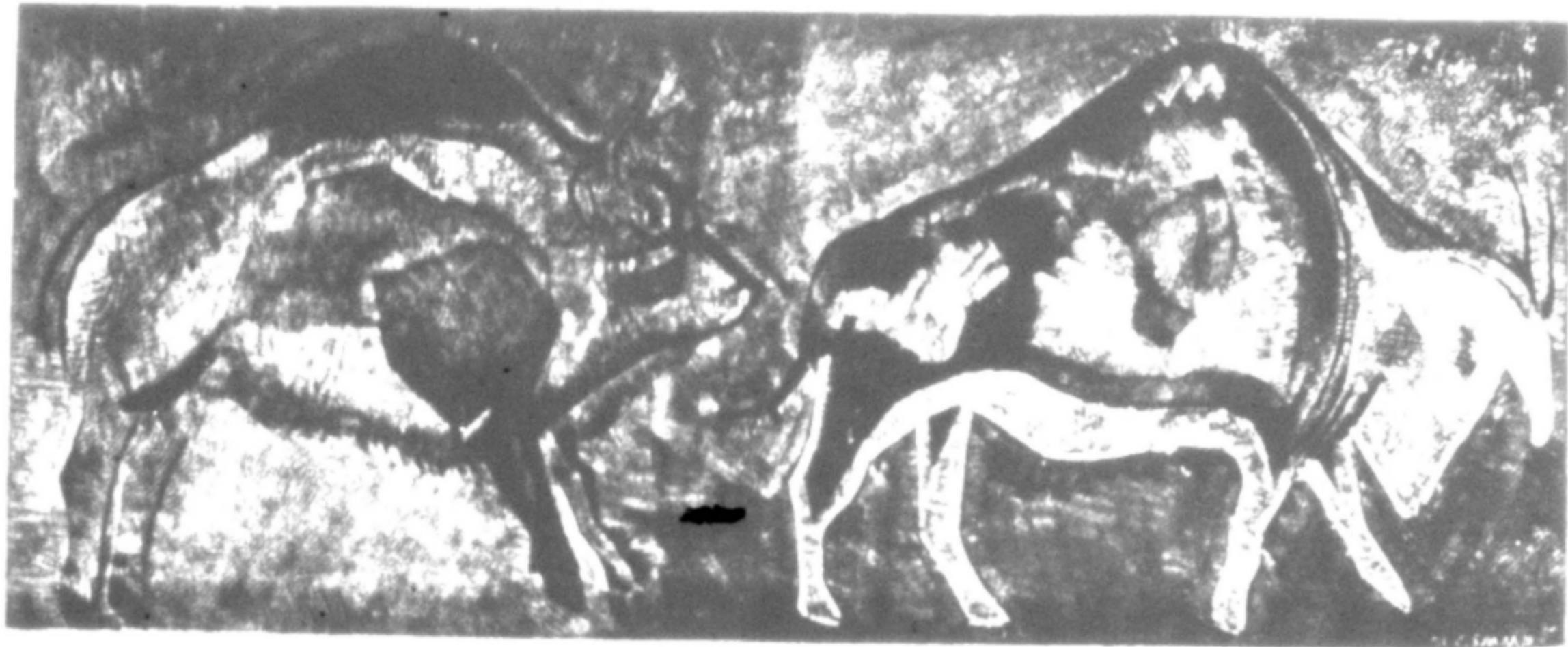
These discoveries now offer a survey of the distribution of prehistoric European art in Africa. They have not been without influence on European life and art. The peoples of Africa and Asia, subjected to ruthless exploitation and economic slavery during the stampede for markets, have had

a certain revenge. For just as the Romans, who brought back the eastern gods and arts of the vanquished tribes as spoils to decorate their palaces were in their turn conquered by them, so pre-war Europe was effected by the exotic arts of Africa and the East. The old African tribal gods, the savage rhythmic dances, the exotic handicrafts and magic art of Africa made a triumphal conquest of European art. Morroco, Tunis, Japan, China, India, the South Seas, the Argentine, Mexico, each in turn and finally Africa and prehistoric culture have all had their day in modernist painting. Like the drowning man, who in the last instant of consciousness reviews his whole life from his earliest childhood memories, so capitalist society was reviewing the whole history of mankind before plunging into the catastrophe of world war.

It is the timely aspect of this prehistoric painting which has led the Museum of Modern Art, devoted exclusively to contemporary culture, to hold this exhibition. To stress their point, they have included a room full of modernist painters where Miro, Masson, Klee, Arp, Lebedev, and Larionov demonstrate their apparent kinship to the oldest painting in the world. Certainly the newly discovered rock painting from the Libyan desert might at first glance be taken for the patterns of abstract surrealism, but at bottom the resemblance is superficial. For primitive painting was magic which had a practical function. Before setting forth to kill an animal, the hunter dramatized it pictorially. This was a magic rite to ensure success and to ward off the evil spirit of the slain animal. In the earliest culture, an attempt was made to approximate nature as closely as possible, no doubt to make the magic more efficacious. But later, perhaps due to haste and the fact that such a mural was immediately comprehensible to the tribe, a short-cut or stylization of the act occurred. Finally the original naturalistic representation



Franco-Cantabrian Style: ALTAMIRA, NORTH SPAIN



becomes a symbolic sign language approaching abstract terms. But the abstract pattern of such a rite retained the original content and was immediately decipherable. The content of modern surrealists is not at all comprehensible to their audience. Its symbolism drawn from the unconscious is often deeply personal and not communicable. Such incomprehensibility may be considered rather an evasion of social reality, which has become too chaotic and contradictory to face even in pictorial terms. The only practical function which surrealism so far has performed is the subjective reflection of the disintegration of bourgeois society. Thus there is no real analogy and certainly no organic relationship between pre-historic art and the latest manifestations of European art, which are entirely a product of their social milieu.

While bourgeois science has given us the material remains of a world that existed when Europe was covered with glaciers, it has not solved the meaning of these relics. Today we know how the man of the Ice Age lived, sheltered in caves, wandering nomadically following the trail of bear, elephant, elk, bison, wild horse, mammoth and reindeer, kept from penetrating northward by a glittering chain of glaciers. We know his ignorance of pottery and of agriculture, his skill at hunting, his weapons of flint, his amazing realistic art. Caves sealed since the dawn of time have opened to reveal his foot prints, his ochre-daubed hands on their walls, the flint palette knife stuck fast in the rock beside his mural, his paint box of earth colors and animal fats. From over 550 sites, relics of the Ice Age culture have been excavated and in 187 of them have been found engravings and paints on rock.

Yet no one has yet adequately explained how it happened that two totally diverse cultures existed contemporaneously so long ago. In Altamira and in the other caves of southern France and Spain we find a realistic and monumental art of animal portraiture. This polychrome painting in illusionist style with sharp contrasts between light and dark, has been termed *Franco-cantabrian* art. Weapons found with it are the most ancient known—the spear and dart. Once its influence extended as far north as England, as far east as South Russia and Siberia, and as far south as Africa.

But there was found on boulders and overhanging rocks in the open a totally different art, which has been labeled Eastern Spanish or *Levant* style. Here shadow silhouettes in monochrome, chiefly red earth, portray man in active movement—leaping, running, jumping, hunting. Although man is here the chief subject, the world is seen in the image of animal life

and of man's close relationship to it. Here the weapons depicted are always the bow and arrow of the tropics. Once it might have been assumed that these two styles derived from diverse cultures and could have developed in different epochs but in 1932, in the rocky wastes of Fezzan, Frobenius made one of the most important pre-historic discoveries of our time. Engraved on desolate high rock terraces, he found hundreds of mammoth portraits of elephants, lions, giraffes and other wild animals from ten to twelve feet high in the *Franco-cantabrian* style. Beside them chiseled deep in the stone were paintings of the *Levant* type. Further expeditions in 1933 and 1935 traced the spread of the *Levant* style of art at the Libyan desert, where pre-Egyptian paintings were found.

The resurrection of these two antipodal pre-historic cultures and the tracing of them from Europe to Africa, where they continued to survive side by side, is not only a matter of interest for anthropologists. A study of these two styles of mural painting from the dawn of mankind has an immediate practical interest for artists today. In their origin, both styles reveal an intense pre-occupation with the natural world. Here minute observation of the momentary aspects of reality emphasizes everything actual. Form is a matter of contour; outlines are frequently engraved. These pre-historic artists knew and mastered many of the problems of modern art. They studied perspective, movement, *chiaroscuro*.

Nor were the great *Franco-cantabrian* murals hastily executed. Thirty years after the discovery of paintings in the Font-de-Gaume cave in France, the original sketches for the same murals, done on stones the size of a plate, were discovered in another cave. Developed *Franco-cantabrian* painting reveals an ever increasing plastic conception of animal life. Structure and muscular tension are dramatized through contrasts of light and dark spots and broken contour, so that a three dimensional art emerges, an art that does not slavishly imitate but seizes on the essential unity of the organism and renders it impressionistically. Naturally these early artists were not concerned with esthetics or expression of personality; their art, like their religion, as revealed in their painting, was highly purposive, intent on gaining "control of the sensory world." It expressed their life—with its unstable, nomadic, hunting economy.

While the purpose of *Levant* art must have been identical with that of the *Franco-cantabrian* art, it developed a totally different expression. *Franco-cantabrian* artist were familiar with many pigments such as ochre, brown iron, red iron, yellow

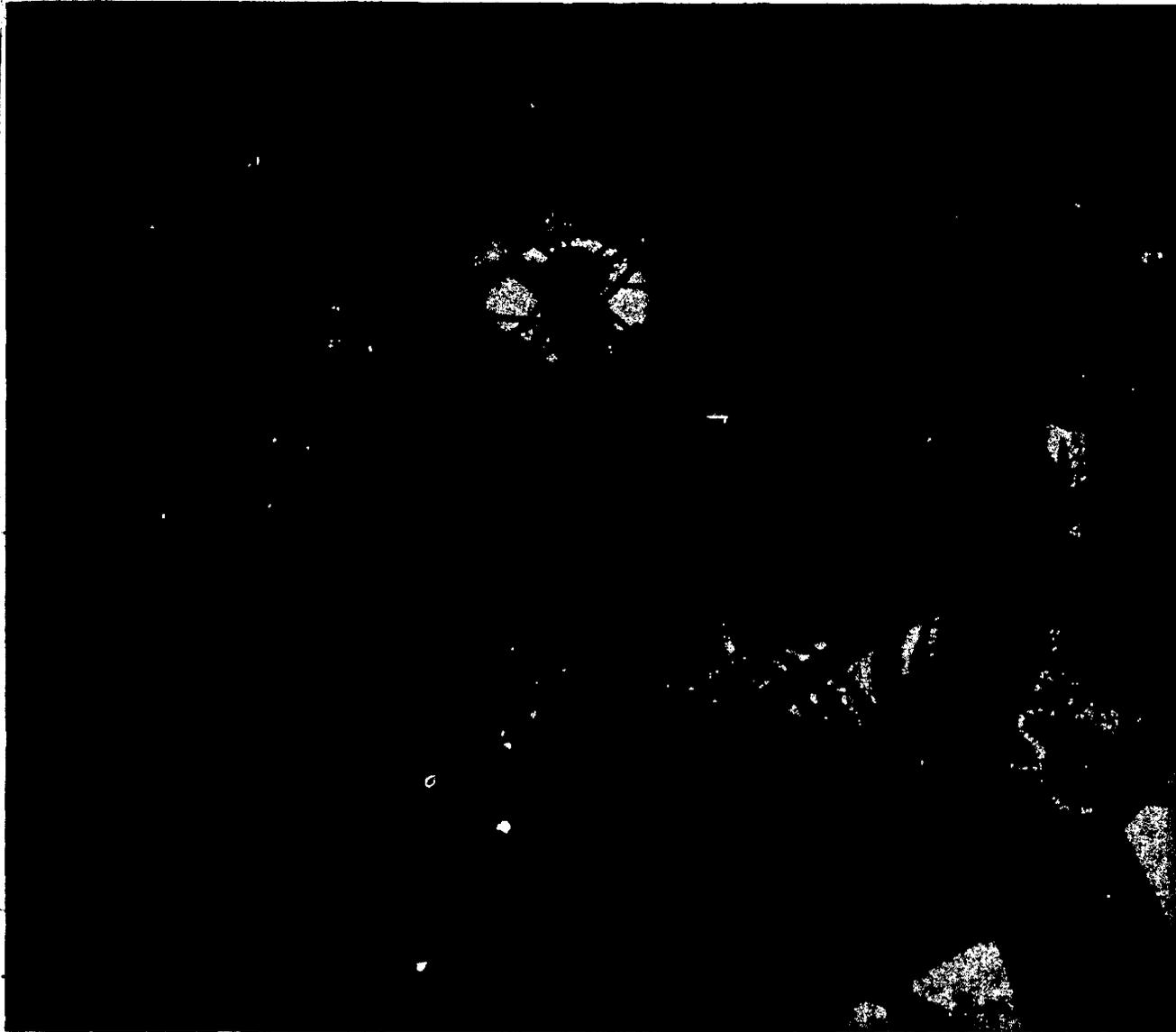


iron ochre, black manganese, and white chalk; *Levant* art is for the most part monochrome. Dealing with man as well as animals, it is much richer in movement, stressing always the tense, leaping, quick movements of both. It depicts both the action of animals and the *active* magic of man seeking to control them. The scale of its figures while larger in Africa than in Spain is always much smaller than the *Franco-cantabrian*.

In the Neo-lithic age, a new world came into being. The roving nomad of the Ice Age was no more. The glaciers had melted. The forests grew and plant life developed. The present European rivers came into being. Man began his long struggle to wrest subsistence from the earth itself. Hunting ceased to be the prime occupation when primitive agriculture developed. Fertility was essential, and as it could not be represented pictorially it was magically ensured through symbols. Animal painting is now replaced by amulets. Late *Levant* painting shows an increasing stylization and a tendency to become static. These so-called "degenerating" forms in which naturalistic rendition gradually becomes increasingly formal, marks a transition to a new form of social organization. The marvelous accuracy of natural observation for individual animals is replaced by group relationships in stylized patterns which tend toward the abstract. Representation of light, air, movement is avoided. By the time of the bronze age, art ceases to be realistic and seeks its ultimate goal in a static geometry. Egyptian art is the highest development of this tendency.

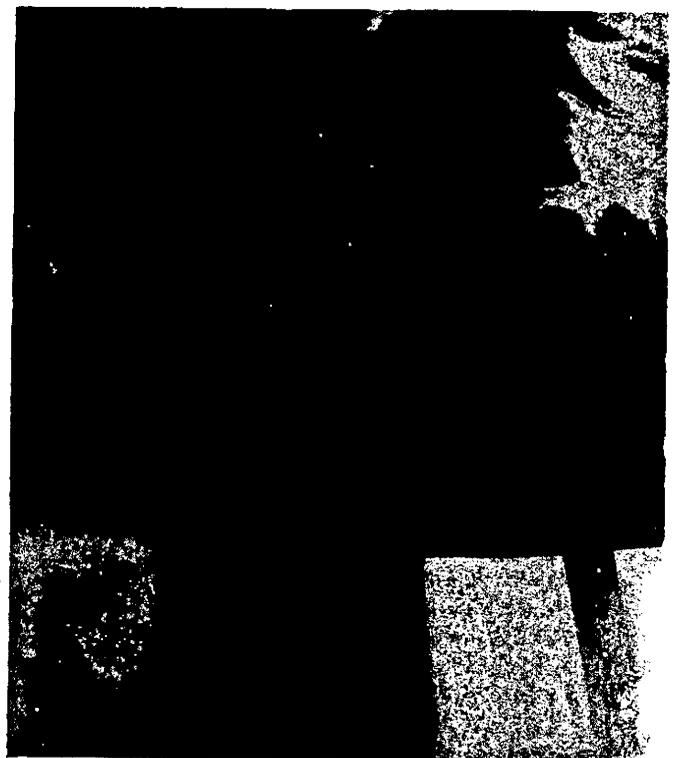
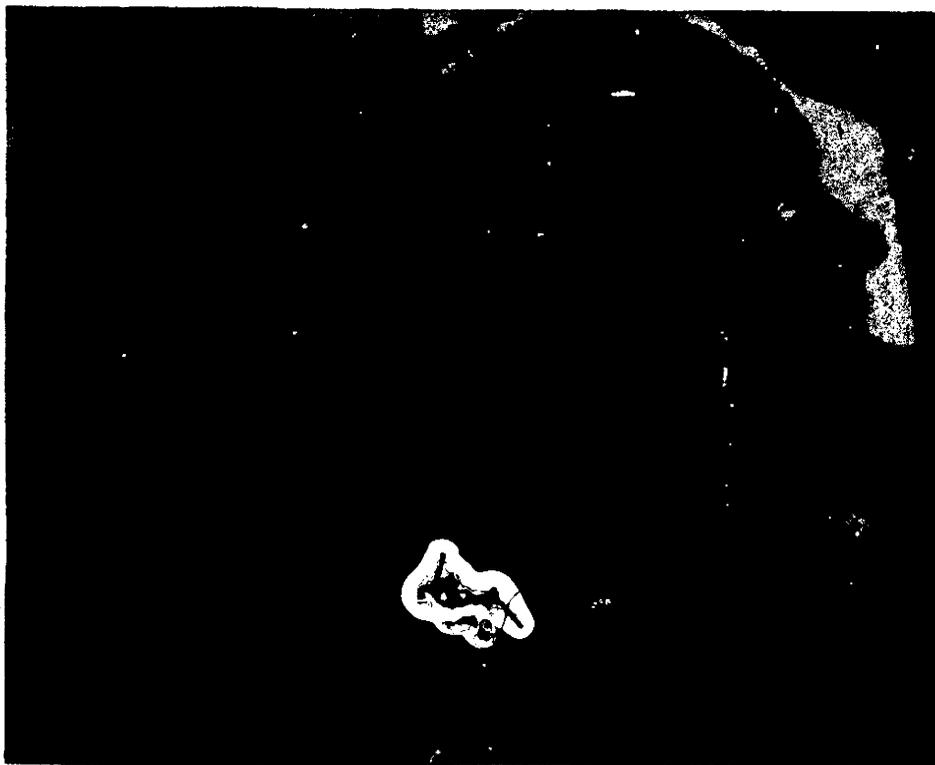
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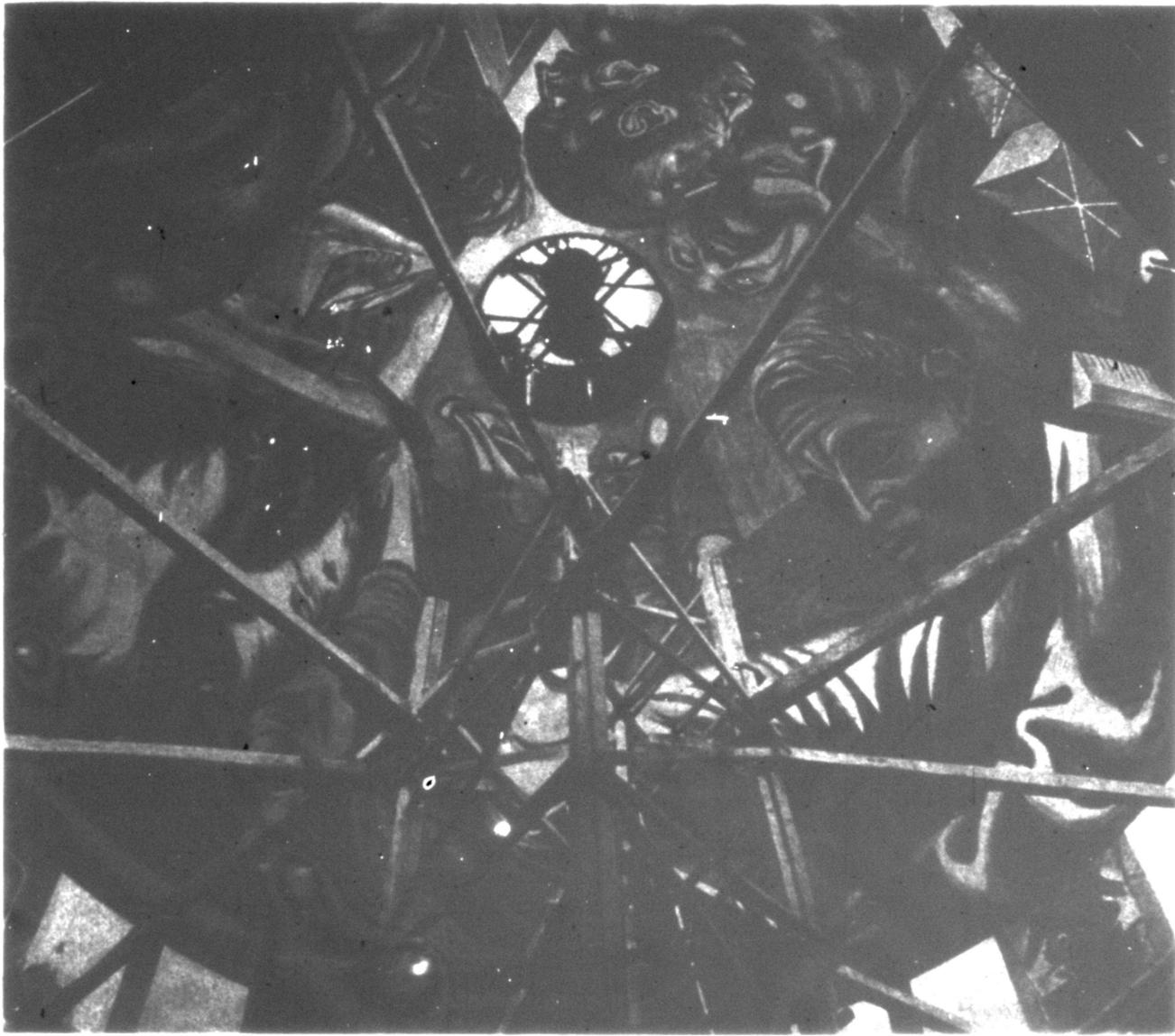




*Mural by
Jose Clemente Orozco
at Guadalajara,
Mexico*

*Dome and details
Photos by Ward
Montague*





FORM AND CONTENT IN ART

By F. D. Klingender

(Continued from May Issue)

5. War and the General Crisis of Capitalism.

We must clearly distinguish the successive phases of this final development leading to our present situation.

(a) *War and Post-War Crisis up to about 1923:*

A violent radicalization of the more contemplative movements of the preceding phase (with the exception, of course, of the futurists). Dadaism: radical destruction of both content and form soon leading to two divergent lines: psychological introspection and activist realism, in this phase the two are, however, still in the main linked to one another; the activists: Grosz, anarchist, at first allied to the proletarian class), Heartfield (political photomontage in the service of the proletarian movement), Dix (now a supporter of Hitler), Masereel. Activist Expressionism (Beckmann, etc.), Magico-Mysticism (Chagall, Klee, etc.). Abstract painting, constructivism, suprematism, "Merz," etc. (Kandinsky, Hölzel, the Russians Malevitch, El Lissitzki, Tatlin, etc., the Hungarians Moholy Nagy, Péri, etc., Mondrian, Schwitters, the later work of the French cubists and purists including Ozenfant, Le Corbusier, etc.). The English war painters (Nevinson, Nash, Lewis, etc.).

(b) *The Temporary Stabilization Period, approximately 1924-1930.*

Defeat of the revolution in the West and rationalization of monopolized industry with the collaboration of reformism, but failure of the intervention campaigns against the U.S.S.R. The tempestuous radicalism of the artists in the preceding phase no longer expressed the mentality of the now re-established ruling class. It was replaced by the reactionary, semi-mystical mannerism of the neo-realists and neo-classicists ("Neue Sachlichkeit": Kanold, Schrimpf, Scholz, etc., in Germany; Utrillo, Herbin, etc., in France; with the victory of fascism in Italy the remaining futurists on the whole adopted a semi-magical, "heroic," neo-classicist style) or else deflected into the safe channels of "paranoic" surrealism.

On the other hand the artists, writers, musicians, actors, etc., allied to the work-

ing class now began to realize that the former slogan-like, semi-anarchic activism no longer sufficed for the new tasks facing the proletarian mass movement and, while largely retaining the technical methods of the preceding era, commenced to develop a more convincing approach based on objective reportage and concrete demonstration (Brecht, Wolf, Péri, Heartfield, etc.).*

(c) *The World Crisis and its Aftermath.*

The successful accomplishment of economic and social reconstruction in the U.S.S.R. coincided with the final collapse of the illusion of capitalist stability. The political disunity of the Western working class enabled fascism to advance in Central Europe. The partial, temporarily restored unity of the capitalist world was again shattered. Violently antagonistic "national" interests are today already measuring their strength in the preliminary engagement of a new imperialist war. The menace of war and fascism is challenged by the growing unity of the working class in every part of the world.

In the countries of fascist reaction the progressive artists of the previous decades are treated as enemies of the state. "Heroic" neo-classicism, able to reproduce the racial and chauvinist "idealism" of the fascist appeal in a visual form intelligible to the petty bourgeois masses, reigns supreme.

In England the middle classes in the 1930 crisis for the first time experienced sufferings comparable to those of the continental middle classes during the post-war and inflation upheavals. As a result an art movement similar to the continental movements of 1920-23 is now making its appearance. In view of its epigonic character most of the works of this new English art resemble the calmer, culminating achievements of the continental artists (heralding the approaching stabilization) more closely than their earlier, more definitely activist works. In a sense it is true to say that the development which on the continent was continuous was in England split into two temporarily distinct phases: the activist phase of the English war paint-

* Leaving the capitalist world we find that during the corresponding period of intense economic and social reconstruction in the U.S.S.R. the vital fusion of the new social content with the formal discoveries of the preceding phase culminated in the achievement of the great silent film and stage productions.

ers coinciding in time with continental activism was in this country in most instances succeeded by the mild naturalism of the so-called "post-impressionists" that reigned supreme for more than a decade before it was challenged by the present culminating phase of modernism emerging with the crisis of the 1930's. Though predominantly abstract, the new English movement has absorbed many surrealist elements and is in most cases a mixture of both.

The English artists (including theatrical and film producers) who today are consciously allying themselves to the working class are either adopting the activist manner of the continental early post-war phase (especially that of Grosz or the earliest Piscator productions), or else attempting in the light of later continental experience to create a new style—utilizing all technical achievements of modern art—that will be able to express the basic content of proletarian struggle in a fully convincing manner, appealing to the workers.*

III

We are now able to approach the problem of the significance of content and form in contemporary art, with which we commenced our discussion, in a more concrete manner.

The conquest of nature was the great historical mission of capitalism. By training the former small-scale producers in the discipline of collective work, by equipping the new working class with the tools of modern science and industry and thus raising the productivity of man at a hitherto unheard of rate, capitalism produced the material conditions required for the successful establishment of a free, classless, society. This progressive rôle of the bourgeoisie was embodied in the mechanical materialism of nineteenth century science and in the objective realism culminating in the art of Courbet.

Once the technical revolution was achieved, as it was in the France of the 1870s, the continued existence of capitalist accumulation with its symptoms of perma-

* It is a fatal mistake to approach the present phase of Russian art with critical conceptions derived from the contemporary capitalist world. With the successful accomplishment of the great Five-Year Plans a whole people is for the first time in history (excepting primitive society) enabled to show a vital interest in art. The temporary prevalence of academic form (despite the

ment poverty for the great mass of the population and of the rapid enrichment of a small minority (symptoms indispensable for its specific task of rapidly increasing the productivity of human labor) ceased to be a historical necessity. The capitalist class joined the forces of reaction, the proletariat took its place as the vanguard of human progress.

The historical task of the proletariat is the solution of the problem of human relations in society: the abolition of class exploitation and the transfer of the means of production to society that alone enables the new mastery over nature to be applied for increasing the welfare of all. Thus the next step in the *content* sphere of art is the step from the objective interpretation of nature to the active transformation of social reality (a step corresponding to the replacement of mechanical by dialectic, historical, materialism). The defeat of the Commune and the social ostracism of the progressive bourgeois artists who had dared openly to support it (the campaign of deliberate calumny of which Courbet was the victim, a campaign persisting even in recent art historical literature, has its equal only in the heresy hunts of the medieval inquisition), for a long time delayed this step.

The development of modern art from impressionism to abstract form has, I submit, the following twofold significance: in the first place it embodies the ever more frantic flight from content, i.e., from social reality, from all reality whatever, of the retrogressive capitalist class. Even during the imperialist era, however, the scientific and technical conquest of nature continued to proceed at a rapid rate, although its fruits could not increase the welfare of man, were in fact applied to the more efficient destruction of man, as long as it remained fettered to the interests of monopoly capitalism. In the same way the progressive energies of the artists, barred as they were by their service to the bourgeoisie from the vital sphere of content,

new content!) in many Russian works of the present time is due in part to the necessarily slow process of raising the artistic consciousness of the great mass of the people above the level embodied in the icon (corresponding to our own 12th century art), in part to the incredible increase in the demand for art that makes it necessary to utilize the heritage in craftsmanship possessed by the old pre-revolutionary artists for the purpose of training the rising generation, and finally to the natural feeling of jubilant relief at the moment of victory, when the masses are for the first time in a position to enjoy the goods of this world. Nevertheless, inspiring signs, heralding the emergence of a new and vital style, are clearly visible, not merely in the present-day theatre and cinema, but also in painting (Deincka, Pimenov, etc.). A full discussion of this problem will be found in my article "Art in the U.S.S.R." in the October issue of "The Eye."

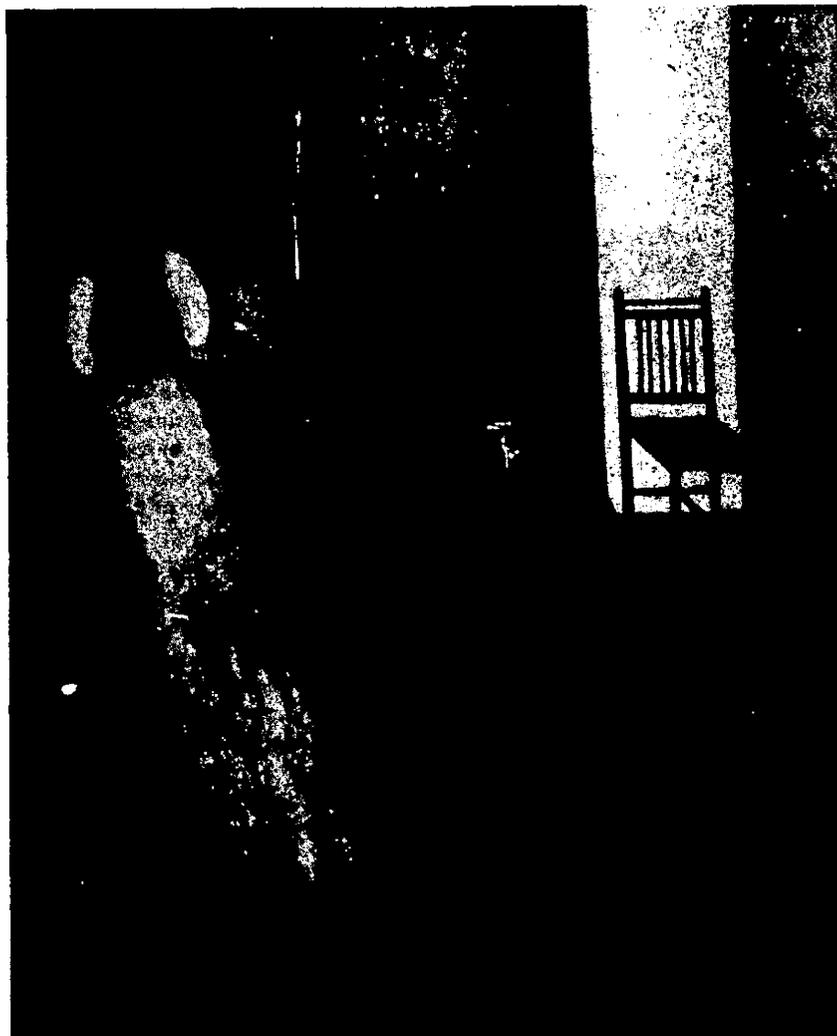
found an escape in the revolutionary transformation of the technique of perception, of artistic communication, of form, a transformation embodying all the optical, acoustic, mechanical achievements of modern science (the conquest of light and color, photography, the film, steel and concrete construction, etc.). It is only necessary to look at any ordinary news reel in order to realize how greatly our most elementary responsiveness to shape and sound has been enlarged by the technical discoveries of modern art. Nevertheless, as long as this technical revolution remains fettered to the escape from content of a decaying class, to the extent that it submits to the negation of content, modern art inevitably sinks to the level of pure experimentation for the discovery of new facts concerning the psycho-physical response of the human organism at the present time to different types of shape and color patterns: to the level, in fact, of the kaleidoscope and of the Montessori bricks. Far from achieving the emancipation of art, the destruction of con-

tent necessarily leads to the destruction also of form—a climax epically symbolized in the white square painted on a white canvas of square shape by the suprematist Malevitch. In its final decay the capitalist class destroys its art, as it destroys its science.

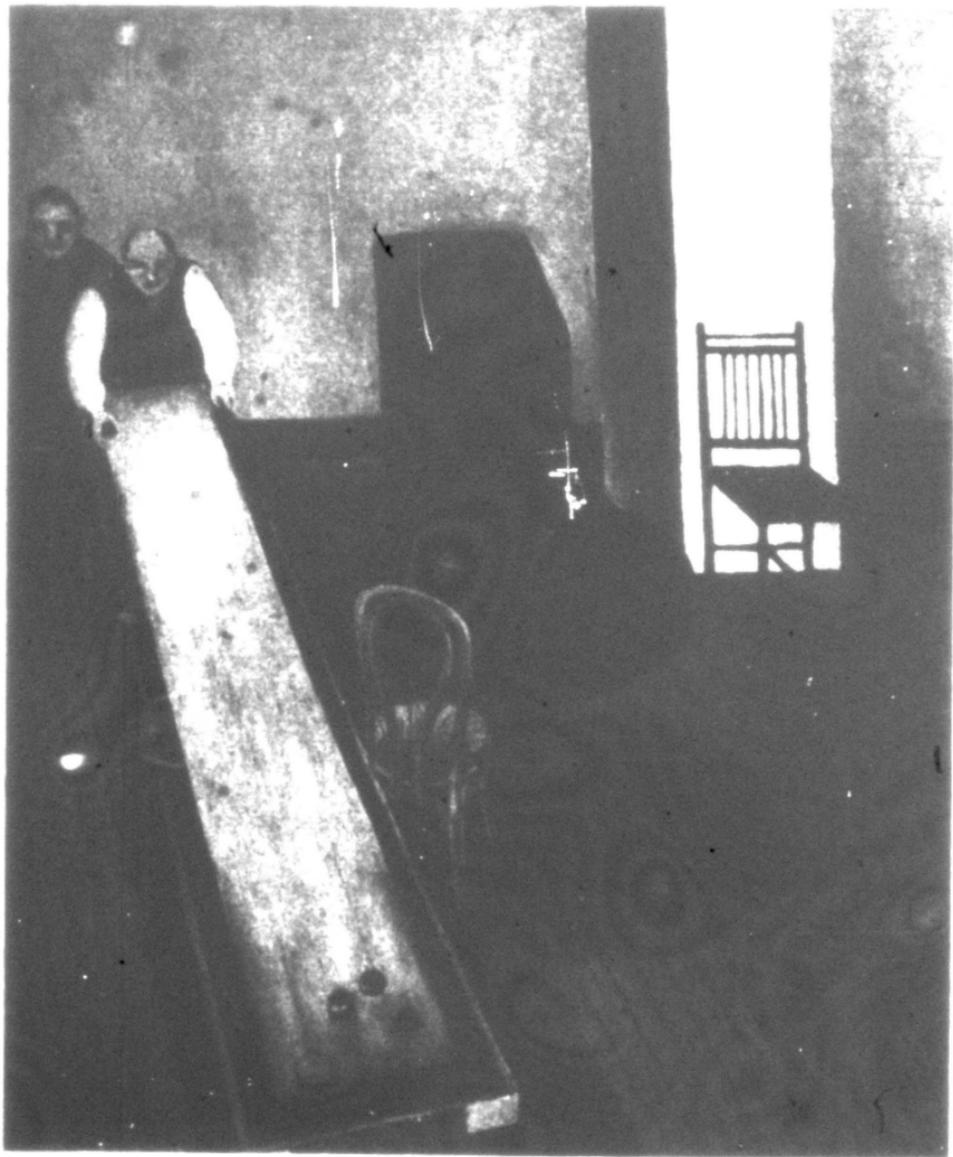
Impoverished, reduced to the income level of the skilled factory hand, or unemployed, the scientist, the technician, the artist increasingly comes to see in the working class of today the standard bearer of all human progress. Transfused with the vital energy of the new social content the technical achievements of modern art will at last lead to an undreamed of enrichment of human experience.

EDITORIAL NOTE

The next issue of ART FRONT, the August-September number, will be ready about the middle of September. We ask all our readers who are not subscribers to fill out the blank on the last page.



Shuffle Board: DAVID DOVGAARD
Courtesy Cooperative Gallery, Newark



BOOKS

MARXISM?

ART AND SOCIETY, *Herbert Read, Macmillan, \$4.00.*

Mr. Lewis Mumford and Mr. Kenneth Burke, writing of this book, have agreed that it is exceptionally exasperating. I always enjoyed agreeing with Mr. Mumford and Mr. Burke, gentle as they are, and in this case I agree completely and then a little more. Art and Society purports to be a Marxist survey of the relations of the plastic arts to the individual and group activities of man, and as such it is about as misleading as could well be conceived.

If ever a Gibbon was needed in the world, he is needed in English high bohemia today. The lush heresies of the early church are but feeble things in comparison with the intellectual air-plants and man-eating orchids that flourish in that quaint hothouse. Mr. Read has managed to get a fair statistical sample of them, if not all, into a book about Art. He calls this Dialectics, you know, the contradiction of the contradiction, thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Sometimes I feel that, going to meetings, working on Projects, and biting policemen, we forget to feel strongly enough about the terrifying situation a lot of our leading intellectuals have got themselves into, particularly in the No Man's Land of the British salon system. And we should feel strongly about it, the casualties have been dreadful. Look at Wyndham Lewis. On the other hand, look at Mr. Read.

The argument of the early part of the book is a little misty and bergsonian and intuitive, but in so far as it is definite, it is based on a notion of primitive mentality so exploded and so obviously chauvinistic, that even a former contributor to the *Criterion* should have known better. Mr. Read quotes extensively from Lucien Levy-Bruhl's "How Natives Think." Levy-Bruhl's thesis is, simply stated, that primitive, or rather non-European man generally, possesses only a "prelogical mind," fundamentally irrational and compulsive, that he lives in a solid world out of which personal and non-personal, group and individual, causal and supernatural elements are not, and cannot be analyzed. "To him there is but one (world). Every reality, like every influence, is mystic, and consequently, every perception is mystic." Marxists, holding a unified world view, are naturally well disposed towards "revolts against dualism," but there are some monists who come like Greeks bearing gifts, and it is sometimes desirable to look gift horses in the mouth, they may turn out to be Trojan horses. The American anthropologist, Boas, and following him, Paul Radin, have conclusively shown both the imperialist bias of Levy-Bruhl's argument and the falsity of his evidence. Prelogical Man is as exploded a scientific hypothesis as the geocentric solar system or the theory of humours. And furthermore, it is recognized as part of that melange of superstitions and prejudices which has formed the intellectual base of fascism.

Mr. Read also treats prehistoric and contemporary uncivilized culture as one problem, capable of ambivalent explanation. He leaps at will from the Altamira cave paintings to line-cuts by Jake (aged 7) to Melanesian New Guinea, constantly stressing anti-intellectual, "mystic" and chance elements in the emergence of art. It is hardly necessary to point out that we know absolutely nothing of the religion, mentality or folk-

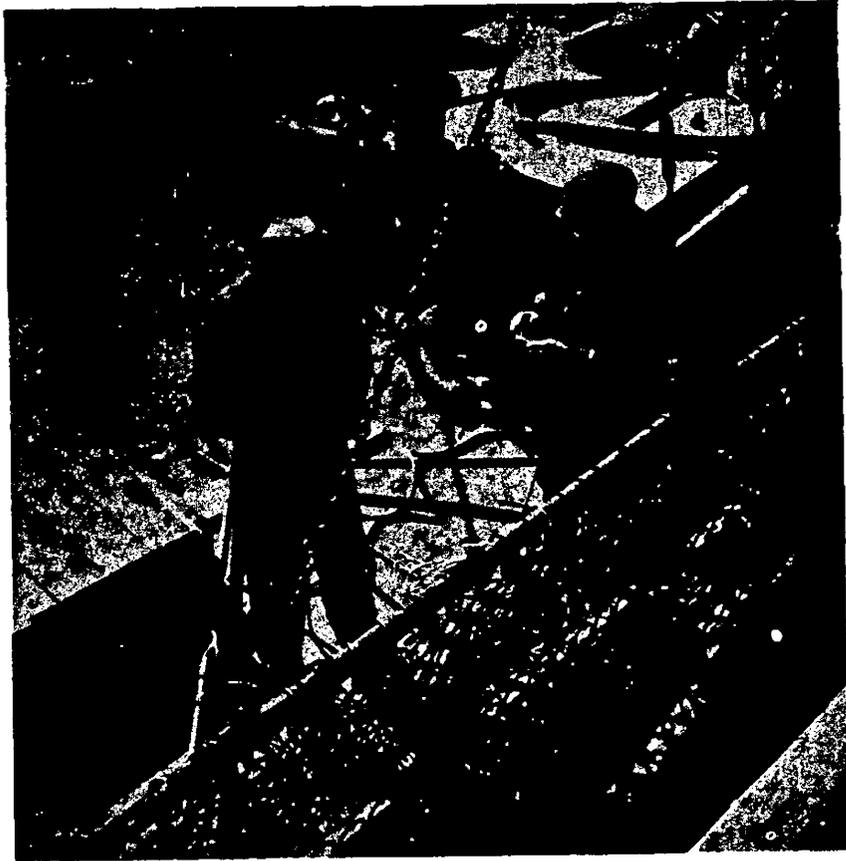
ways of prehistoric man, that the highly rationalized and systematic art of Papua has no more to do with the creations of Jake (aged 7) than has Raphael's Stanzas. Generalizations about primitive people await a long process of further collection and digestion of data, and there is no more dangerous generalization than that which lumps the people of any tribe, let alone all primitive people, into one undifferentiated stew of "primitive mentality." Dr. Radin has shown that there are as many attitudes toward so-called magical procedures in any tribe as there are attitudes towards science and religion in contemporary civilized society.

As Kenneth Burke points out, Levy-Bruhl and Freud are used by Mr. Read to develop a theory of an "artist personality" distinctly different in degree if not in kind from that of the ordinary man's. This of course is just the issue of aesthetics. "Aesthetic" problems are inextricably entwined with the fundamental questions of being, willing and thinking, they must enter into the discussion of rational life at the very beginnings and not be placed at the end and exercised with the fancy logomancy of Freudian terminology. It is difficult to imagine a more convenient evasion of the whole problem.

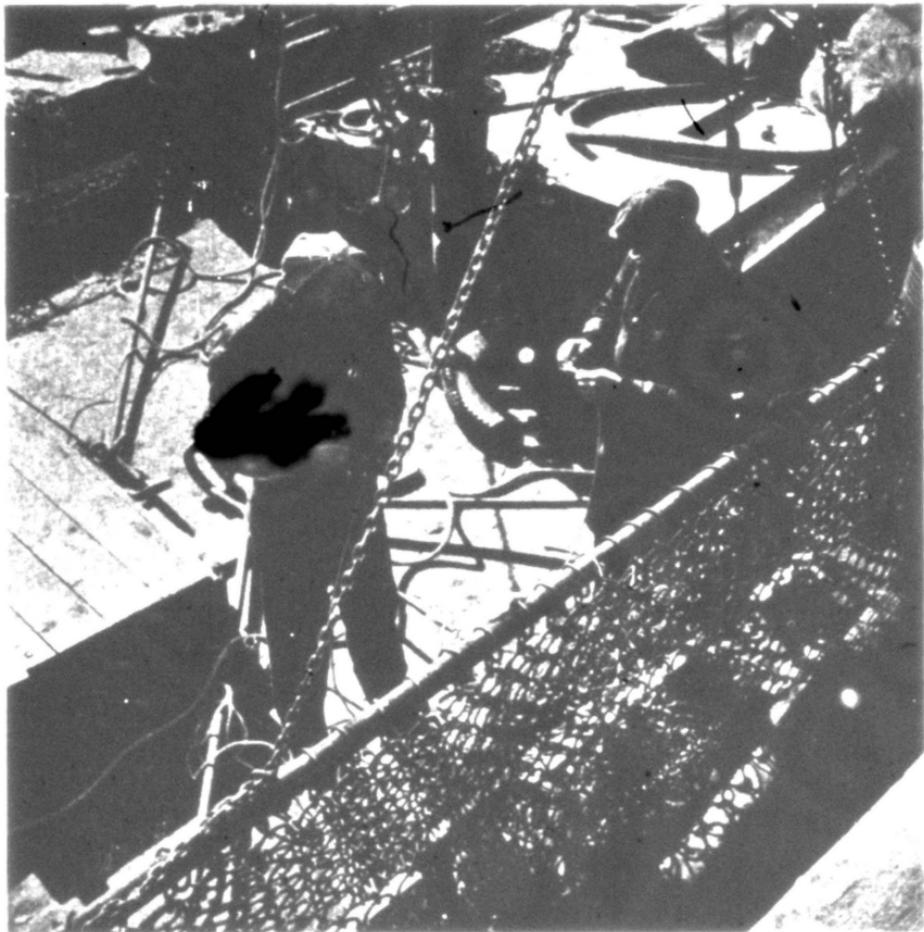
For a supposedly Marxist work, Art and Society is remarkably barren of any discussion of the function of art and its emergence in the daily life of people as a whole. There is no, or little, mention of the methods, instruments and relations of production accompanying any cultural period, and class relations are filtered through the very treacherous screen of religious patterns. Doubtless such an approach simplifies matters

considerably, but its reliability is open to question.

A little over half way through the book the surrealist african emerges from the woodpile in full panoply, brandishing of all things, Pareto. Leaning heavily on Pareto's theory of "elites," Mr. Read advances the thesis that the artist has, throughout the nineteenth century, concentrated more and more exclusively on expressive (mystical) elements in painting and has now ceased to have any identification with, or appeal to, the common people. That significant painting in the twentieth century has become the concern of a limited "elite," the artists and their friends and patrons, recruited largely from the ruling class. That popular art has gone on its own way, realistic, and immediate, and practical in its appeal. That, although this division is especially marked today, it has only been more or less hidden in the past. "The artist," says Read, "stands in psychological opposition to the crowd . . . (his) very acuteness of perception . . . is purchased at the price of maladaptation, of nonconformity and revolt." (Shades of Lombroso and Nordau! Just about everything is wrong with this thesis.) The central assumption is, as Burke pointed out, both a fallacy and an evasion. It is not how the artist differs that makes him an artist, it is his ability to sublimate the typical, social experience into new realms of value. Further, the classical tradition in modern painting, i.e., that culminating in cubism and related movements, has immense popular appeal, as the most casual glance at commercial and industrial art will show. Artists as abstract as Mondrian have profoundly influenced industrial design, particularly, in his



*Along the Waterfront: DAVID ROBBINS
Courtesy W.P.A. Photo Project*



case, in typography, layout, and architecture. Commercial artists like MacKnight Kauffer are internationally famous as artists and at the same time well paid by quite-practical advertisers. The long struggle of 19th century french painting was essentially a violent revolution against parvenu wealth, and most every painter of that period believed that if he could once break through the wall of tasteless connoisseurs that separated him from the "common people" and present his case, he would be saved. It took a generation to get Van Gogh through this barrier, the crowds that attended the exhibition two years ago disprove any "theory of elites." Finally, do we have to point out again that only in societies dominated by the "cash nexus" is the artist an abnormality. He is simply considered crazy because he is not primarily interested in making money out of other people's work. In New Guinea or Florence the artist was a respected member of the community. Everybody knows this and I don't see how Mr. Read could have overlooked it.

The book ends with a few faint damns for functionalist and abstract art, a criticism of Socialist Realism as presented by Radek and Bukharin and an apotheosis of surrealism. Inasmuch as abstract and fundamentalist art is the only contemporary art which has made the transition from the atelier to the factory, print shop and drafting room, criticism at this late date can't hurt it. If you don't want to call us artists we don't care, you can have the label for what it cost us. Radek's presentation of Socialist Realism, and to a slighter extent Bukharin's, seem to have been purposely as outrageous as possible, designed to drive the most articulate artists of the Soviet Union to desperation. Intellectual is sometimes just as effective as industrial wrecking, and much harder to check upon. Fortunately all this is a thing of the past and Mr. Putnam's definition of Socialist Realism in the March ART FRONT leaves room for everybody from Moholy-Nagy to Soutine. As for Freud and surrealism, I don't like to hurt anybody's feelings, but I can't discuss Ids and Supergos with a straight face. When I read, "the laws of logic, above all the law of contradiction, do not hold for processes in the Id," I turn to Thurber.

To sum up. The book is through and through irrational, intuitive, idealistic and aristocratic. If sentences like, "the sensational awareness of the ego is brought into direct contact with the Id and from that "seething cauldron" snatches some archetypal form, some instinctive association of words, images or sounds which constitutes the basis of the work of art" do not represent the grossest idealism, a sort of unholy Freudian neoplatonism, I can't recognize the beast. Nothing could show the inadequacy of our instruments and research in the field of real aesthetics more clearly than this continued mystagogy in the psychology of art.

Art, to Mr. Read, is a peculiar, fundamentally distinct mode of knowledge, an irrational apprehension of unanalyzable experience. In spite of monistic professions he thus establishes two fields of reality, the "real" world of everyday experience and the idealistic realm of subconscious "forces."

The world is through and through either one or the other, it cannot be both rational and irrational. It is the belief of dialectical materialism that it is rational, in the limited sense of being orderly, and orderly *in the same way* as the human mind, because the mind is only a focused part of that one, real world.

The chapter on Art and Education reveals the platonizing bias of Read's thought. There is a great deal of discussion of the special training of an elite of artists, and an elite that would have filled the clean, orderly mind of Plato with horror. Thus, "the Republic of those days would then have to decide how many artists it wanted for its social economy, and according to that quota, a certain proportion would be selected and trained accordingly. *Naturally it would be a training without any ideological or intellectual bias.*"!!! (My italics.) Has Mr. Read never heard of the "withering away of the state," of Lenin's "universal man" capable of running a lathe, managing a state, painting a picture or writing a poem? Has he ever heard of the "democratization of art"? What does he think this is all about anyway?

Kenneth Rexroth.

EXHIBITIONS

Harlem Artists Guild Exhibits

The Harlem Artists' Guild has just concluded its first group exhibition at the American Artists' School Gallery. This vigorous organization, whose program originally concerned itself with the fostering of Negro rights in the field of culture, has broadened out to defend the interests of all artists regardless of color. Building up from less than a dozen members in March, 1935, the Guild membership at present numbers about ninety artists.

Twenty-three of the Guild members participated in the exhibition. Henry W. Bannarn showed good work in oil, water-color and sculpture, with the highly animated canvas, "Skaters," taking the palm. Aaron Douglas showed four pictures, with "Landscape" capturing most interest because of the sound designing of repeated verticals and horizontals to give the sense of restfulness.

Vertis Hayes showed several canvases with his characteristic harmonies of reticent greys; Ronald Joseph had standouts in "The Clown," "Bus" and "Madonna"; Charles Alston's "Girl in Red Dress" made a striking arrangement in color shapes.

Other exhibitors were John Ingless Atkinson, Romare Beardon, Gwen Bennett, Howard G. Brooks, Coleman, Ernie Crichlow, Edgar Evans, Carl C. Hill, Burt Jackson, Gwei Knight, Jacob Lawrence, Richard Lindsey, Norman, Frederick Perry, Evangeline St. Claire, John Sollace Glenn, Lewis Vaughn and Ellis Wilson.

Unemployed Artists in Large Show

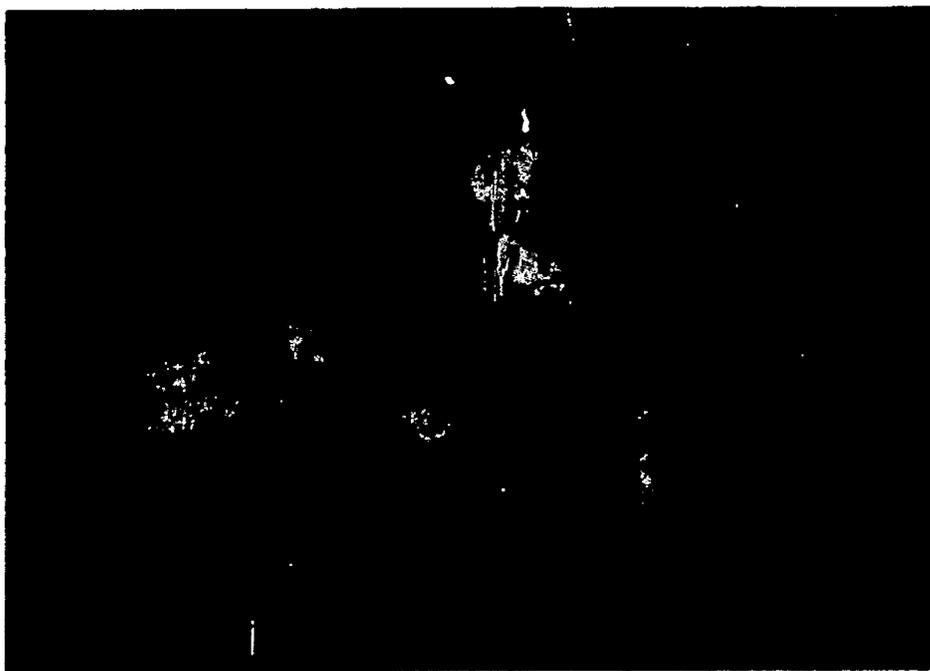
Unemployed New York artists gave ample proof of their quality and quantity in the recently concluded exhibition at the New School for Social Research. Sponsored by the Artists' Union, the show covered several floors and revealed the startling number of excellent talents who have no means of income and are in most cases completely destitute. People would be surprised at the large number of names familiar to gallery goers.

At this moment when the entire project is in imminent danger of curtailment, the wisdom of fighting for more jobs for the unemployed becomes apparent. This exhibition gives the lie to those who try to put the stigma of incompetence on the unemployed and reveals the arbitrary manner in which the whole problem is handled by the administration.

Photography as Art and Document

The old arguments about whether or not photography was art and like questions seem very remote at the moment. Spurred on by recent developments in the cinema, advertising art and the Museum of Modern Art photography show, to say nothing of its own inherent qualities as a mass art, photography has swept the land and seems here to stay.

It is no wonder, then, that the Photographic Division of the Federal Art Project has put on the first independent showing of this section at the Federal Art Gallery in New York. It needed a bit of prodding from the Artists' Union Public Use of Art Committee to convince the administration that photographs could be allocated like other art works, with trade unions the most likely candidates for prints. But the administration got the point with commendable promptness



Construction: THOMAS NAGAI





Float constructed by Siqueiros Experimental Work Shop, May Day Parade, 1937.

and added a Creative Division to the already established Service Division.

Aron Egel devoted all of his plates to studies of old Hebrew scholars and devout old women performing their traditional rituals; David Robbins went along the waterfront for his tragic commentary; Cyril Mipaas arranged several photo-montages entitled "Theme and Variations"; George Herlick did city scenes with the accent on street vendors; Andrew Herman concentrated on the Sewing Project, getting some fine shots of workers' hands; Mark Nadir composed lonely patterns from the bleak structures of the city.

Project Painters in Union Show

At the initiative of the Artists Union, the easel painters of the Federal Art Project displayed their non-project work on the fourth and fifth floors of the New School for Social Research. If any further argument were needed to stress the high quality of most of the project artists, this recently concluded show should hammer home that point with the force of a pile driver.

The importance of the art project is evident in the flowering of a considerable number of fine young painters and the rejuvenation of some of the older ones. The show at the New School featured work by both categories.

Outstanding paintings include those by Joseph de Martini, Louis Harris, Louis Nisonoff, Ben Benn, Miron Sokole, Jennings Tofel, Otto Botto, Joseph Solman, Adolph Gottlieb, Ary Stillman, Max Schnitzler, Harold Baumbach, Jules Halfant, James Lechay, Nicholas Luisi, Maurice Sievan, Saul Weinstock, Moses Oley, Geri Pine, Thomas Nagai, Louis Ribak, Zoltan Hecht, A. Tromka, Vincent Campanella, Nicholas Takis, Bruce Mitchell, Jean Liberte, H. Abramson, Douglas Taylor, John Oppen, Victor Thal, Carl Jacoby, James Guy, Ferdinand Lo Porto and several others.

J. K.

Art for Subways

On October 5th, or perhaps 6th, 1937, Project and Union artists will open an exhibition of art for subways. This undertaking is being sponsored by the Public Use of Art Committee of the Artists' Union of New York.

SOME LETTERS

(Continued from page 7)

it any traces of thought, there lay hidden, of course, the indications of the level of civilization reached by the critics of cultural projects. They acknowledged the need of keeping the ditch-digger from starvation—somebody will always have to do the hard physical work of the world. But everything and everybody not needed to produce the "necessities" of the world can really be dispensed with. As for teaching people out of work how to improve their minds, or to find relief from idleness in some new form of expression, or developing a latent talent, that was considered by many to be too silly for words.

It is unnecessary in this company, where it is well known, to recite the list of admirable projects started in every part of the country in the various fields already referred to. The important question is now how are we going to keep up the best of this good work?

*Public Use of Art Committee,
Artists' Union
New York City*

We have noted, in a recent article of the New York Times, your organization's interest in the encouragement of public use of art. We are endeavoring to follow similar educational programs in Cleveland. We will be pleased if, from time to time, you will keep us informed on any of the more successful phases of your studies and programs.

H. E. Varga,

*Director of Parks and Public Property,
City of Cleveland.*

*Public Use of Art Committee,
Artists' Union,
New York, New York.*

We have watched with great interest the growth and work of the W.P.A. Art Committee. As trade unionists, we wish to express our sincere appreciation and evaluation for the potentialities of the vital art program as planned and executed. It is aiding and can aid greatly in the pictorial development of the America which our forefathers dreamed and which the hardy pioneers visualized.

We go on record, requesting that the work of this committee be continued and augmented to more adequately record the truly American scene.

**BROTHERHOOD OF
SLEEPING CAR PORTERS**

*International Field Organizer,
B. F. McLaurin,*

*Public Use of Art Committee,
Artists' Union
New York City*

The art exhibit of Federal Art Project works shown in our union has had distinct social and educational effectiveness. The membership has registered its appreciation of the exhibit and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to see works of art so close at hand.

We should like, also, to acknowledge the cooperation of the Artists Union of New York, without whose efforts the exhibition could not have been presented, and the valuable assistance of the Artist Union's Public Use of Art Committee, who had selected pictures that were of particular interest to our union. We heartily endorse the idea of a permanent Federal Art Project through which we could continue to bring before our membership exhibits of art which will contribute so largely to their cultural life.

Jacob Rosenburg,

President Local 802,

American Federation of Musicians.

*Public Use of Art Committee
Artists' Union
New York City*

Having been acquainted with the work of the W.P.A. Committee for the Public Use of the Arts, I wish to express my belief in the great value of the research it is doing both for the

Every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evening during the Summer the gallery will be open to the public from 8 P.M. to 10 P.M. Although no one-man shows will be held, there will always be an interesting group of oils, water colors and drawings on exhibition.

The gallery will resume its regular schedule in October.

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artists in giving them a wider outlet and closer connection with social need, and for the public.

While the result will be important for public health and mental hygiene I wish to speak especially of its great potential worth for the schools.

John Dewey.

Public Use of Art Committee,
Artists' Union
New York City

I heartily approve of the expansion of the Federal Art Projects to include the development of sculpture-mosaics and sculptured terra cotta reliefs in the subways of New York. This would show the visitors to the 1939 World's Fair how cultural minded and advanced the city of New York is, artistically as well as otherwise.

It would take away the cold-blooded freight yard and dismal aspect of our subways and lend a touch of beauty that would make hundreds of thousands of human beings conscious of art who never would come in contact with it otherwise.

It is an experiment very well worth trying and I personally feel it would be a great success.

William Zorach.

Public Use of Art Committee
Artists' Union
New York City

The Federal Art Project must be commended for its support of artists who manifest a real concern with new and vital subject matter. It is this type of cooperative work which will create a new public for the American artist; the great mass of American people, the natural inheritors of a national culture.

The Transport Workers Union fully endorses the idea of a permanent Federal Art Project.

Michael Quill.

PREHISTORIC ROCK PICTURES

(Continued from page 11)

While both Crete and Greece were later to create a new naturalistic art focussed on organic form, it was not until centuries later that the depiction of animal life could achieve, on another social level, the incredible vitality and truth of the art of the Ice Age.

Perhaps the future is not distant when Marxist science will unravel the mysteries of pre-historic human relationships and thus lay bare the social roots out of which grew these two diverse styles in pre-historic culture. Engels was the first to attempt an interpretation of the social organization of primitive man. In our day Freud has sought to reconstruct his primitive mentality. Bourgeois science has assembled all this vast material out of the distant past. But as yet no one has charted the laws by which the pendulum in art swings from the pole of representation to the pole of abstraction and back again or how those changes relate to changes in the body of society itself.

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