

Artist-Critic Scores Exhibit of American Art

Editor's note: Prof. Emile Zoir, noted Swedish artist, who with Mrs. Zoir, is spending the fall and winter with Mrs. Louis Bourgeois at her studio home at 536 Sheridan road, Wilmette, and who is conducting an art school there, has offered the following as his criticism of the American Art exhibition at the Chicago Art Institute.

By Emile Zoir

Everything is moving forward with a mighty rush in America. It leaves very little time for gathering of knowledge and this truth strikes you very forcibly when entering the American Art exhibition in the Art Institute. Nobody seems to have had any time to study and you fill all requirements if you can get together something that will squeeze in through the jury somehow or other. But it is surprising how a jury can have the heart to help all these mediocre painters to show the world how little they know about art. It would be a more charitable act to have most of those paintings ousted out of the back door. By doing so a few might come to understand their shortcomings and go back to school. If they could be made to comprehend that the time they spend in school sometimes is the happiest and most profitable of an artist's career, they would profit more by the occasion to study. During the modern history of art there has been a decided tendency to return to the mediaeval ages for the sources of true art. But after exploring the Assyrian and Egyptian sculptures there seems to be a feeling of retirement all through the formerly so lively regions.

Europe Still Guides

The fact is that Europe is still feeling the heavy burden of war and the lack of energy which generally will follow after such an outburst of power. But still Europe is holding its own and guiding the movement of art. A natural relaxation is observable and makes it quite natural that we might begin to look forward to young America to continue the work, to be the salvation of the old European culture and to stand guard over the inheritance which is coming to it.

It is the artists of America who are to carry the work of culture in times to come. Modern art is not a freak or a disease in civilization. It is the final outcome of centuries of concentrated thinking. But it should be forwarded, not as indicated in the present exhibition of American artists. Most of those "rough riders" show powers and abilities that might be put to better purposes than filling art exhibitions with paintings wanted by nobody and which nobody cares to understand.

"The Fossil Hunters" is a somewhat clever work by an artist who wishes to feel in touch with the advanced art, but he never endeavored to acquire knowledge of the innermost substances of that which we now call modern art. It stands as nothing but an experiment, without the background of science to strengthen the foundation on which he must rest.

The Logan prize winner stands to this day plowing the old furrow and has not even made an attempt to free his heels of the clod of the soil.

Difficult for Lecturer

The lecturer, Mr. Dudley Crafts Watson, had a difficult problem to solve when speaking of the merits of the different paintings. These works, representing neither thought, advancement, nor new ideas of any kind, were hard to give a satisfactory

treatment. It really required such a superior and supple intelligence as this speaker has to succeed in making a palatable song on dead door-nails. But Dudley Crafts Watson is a lecturer of high class.

The modernistic works shown in this exhibition were certainly a show of grief.

Modern art should be carried forward on different lines. But while we expect the work to rest on scientific principles, there must be power and enthusiasm, not drudgery, behind the movement.

It requires our simultaneously gathered thought to make a break for the new fields of culture. The ruined state of the old world needs American assistance to save our inheritance.

Art is the blue flower of intelligence and culture. We are no longer to adhere to the antiquated and petrified idols which, during long periods of stagnation, have kept art in its iron embrace.

Plea to American Artists

The artists of America, endowed with foresightedness, are to wake up to this fact and do their best for the renaissance of art. They should wake up and make the superiority of American reasoning take a strong hold and direct the course. In this way only can they prevent the inheritance of ages to be disastrously thrown to the winds or left at the mercy of the barbarous and low-minded.

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