

1950

# Understanding modern art

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Thesis  
UNDERSTANDING MODERN ART

Submitted by  
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TABLE OF CONTENTS  
UNDERSTANDING MODERN ART

Chapter	Page
I THE OBJECTIVES	1
1. Statement of the problem	
2. Justification of the study	2
3. Method of attack	3
II THE PUZZLE OF MODERN ART	6
1. Evolution of modern art	7
2. Questions about modern art	8
III THE DEFINITION OF ART	13
1. Definitions by philosophers	
2. A working definition of art	20
IV THE CREEDS OF SOME MODERN ARTISTS	23
1. Paul Cezanne	
2. Vincent Van Gogh	24
3. Henri Matisse	27
4. André Derain	28
5. Juan Gris	
6. Marc Chagall	29
7. Georges Braque	30
V THE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING	32
1. The relation to environment	
2. The relation to story telling	38
3. The relation to copying nature	40
4. The relation to psychology, life, and science	42



5. The relation to a medium	43
6. The relation to creativeness	
7. The relation to the free man	45
VI THE TIMELESS ASPECTS OF MODERN ART	46
1. Examples from the Museum of Modern Art	
2. Primitive art and direct expression	49
3. The art of Persia and decoration	51
4. The art of India and Soul expression	
5. El Greco and distortion	52
6. Daumier and cartooning	53
7. Bosch, Brueghel and Devils	
8. Egypt and psychological portraiture	54
9. China and the essence of life and art	55
10. Egypt and double images	57
VII THE SCHOOLS OF MODERN ART	59
1. Leading to Impressionism	
2. Impressionism	60
3. Post-Impressionism	63
A. The school of form	
1) Cezanne	
2) Seurat	65
3) Cubism	
4) Purism	67
B. The school of emotion	69
1) Van Gogh	
2) Fauvism	

3) Expressionism	
C. The school of decoration	70
1) Gauguin	
2) Symbolism	71
3) Primitivism	73
4. Futurism	74
5. Surrealism	
6. Mexican International Modernism	76
7. Pablo Picasso	
VIII LETS LOOK AT SOME PAINTINGS	79
1. Botticelli, "Birth of Venus"	
2. Picasso, "Guernica Mural"	82
3. Picasso, "Girl Before a Mirror"	86
4. Matisse, "Goldfish and Sculpture"	90
5. Rouault, "Three Judges"	91
IX A WORD ABOUT MODERN SCULPTURE	96
1. The aims of modern sculptors	98
2. Pioneers of new paths	99
X GENERAL SUMMARY	102
1. The influence of modern art in contemporary life	
2. Conclusion	
3. Further studies needed	
4. Recommendations	107
Bibliography	108

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Page

1. Van Gogh, "La Ronde Des Prisonniers"	27
2. Comparison, Panamanian deer's head mask and Picasso's sketch of a horse	47
3. Comparison, Argentinian Indian disk and Klee painting	48
4. Comparison, Christian Copt Madonna and Rouault head of Christ	49
5. Comparison, Prehistoric Venus and Lachaise bronze statuette	50
6. Brueghel, "The Downfall of the Magician"	54
7. Pissarro, "Bather in the Woods"	62
8. Cezanne, "Landscape"	64
9. Picasso, "Le Violon au Cafe"	66
10. Mondrian, "Composition"	68
11. Miro, "Harlequin's Holiday"	73
12. Marin, "Maine Islands"	75
13. Botticelli, "The Birth of Venus"	79
14. Picasso, "Guernica Mural"	82
15. Picasso, "Girl Before a Mirror"	86
16. Matisse, "Goldfish and Sculpture"	90
17. Rouault, "Three Judges"	91
18. Moore, "Family Group"	96
19. Archipenko, "The Bride"	100

10  
CHAPTER I

THE OBJECTIVES

308 study  
The primary objective of this ~~thesis~~ <sup>study</sup> will be to explain the theories and philosophies of modern art in terms the layman can understand. Such an explanation is necessary in order to introduce the intelligent, sympathetic layman to this amazing phenomenon. An appeal of this nature would have little attraction for the type of person to whom the enjoyment of art, music, philosophy and the more sensitive expressions of life will forever remain a mystery. An expression such as this would only be appreciated by those who have the inclinations and capacities to understand so complex a development. Therefore, we must direct our attention to those who want to learn about modern art and to the teachers and educators of our country who should be able to explain so important a phase of our life as contemporary art to their students.

We, the artists and teachers of ~~art~~, realize that a seemingly tremendous gulf has been formed between the creators of modern art and the people for whom that art was created. Perhaps we cannot bridge that gulf, but the attempt must be made if people are to understand its meaning for them. We must be able to satisfy the valid questionings of these puzzled and inquiring people because they have a right to intelligent answers. Such questions as, "What is it supposed to be?", "What do they expect us, as laymen, to get out of that?", "Why do they work

as they do?", "Why has modern art developed in this way?", are questions which call for sensible, considered answers. Perhaps the reason that so few artists have tried to answer these questions is that they are so engrossed in their particular mode of expression with its advanced thinking and technical language that they find it difficult or impossible to express themselves in words intelligible to the layman. Their explanations, their definitions, are too abstract. What they are able to say in a plastic medium they cannot say in words. Yet the understanding and appreciation of contemporary art is such an integral part in the cultural maturity of a people that there is a great need for a simple, clear, concise presentation of the topic which will correct this obvious misunderstanding.

Mr. A.H. Barr<sup>1</sup> of the Museum of Modern Art sums up the justification of such a study very neatly:

1. We are living in the twentieth century, we made it, we should study it, understand it, get joy out of it, master it.
2. Physicists, economists, psychologists, etc., would feel absurd not to live in their own century.
3. Yet modern professors know more about Sano di Pietro than about Picasso. More schools deal with fifteenth to seventeenth century art than with modern art. There is more study of Gothic engineering than of structural steel. The majority of teachers are well grounded in art of the past and know little of their own art.
4. The majority of Master's and Doctor's thesis papers on art deal with art of remote eras. There is a great need for graduate work in modern art. Where else can correspondence be carried on directly with the artist?

The problem which faces us now is to explain modern art so that it will be intelligible to the layman. Since art is too

1) A.H. Barr Jr., "Modern Art Makes History Too", College Art Journal, November, 1941, pp. 3 - 6

subjective, too dependent upon personal appeal, the theorist in art cannot use a scientific approach or method of explanation.

It is common knowledge that what I like you may not like. Among the many other factors that cloud the picture of modern art are the biased opinions held by critics and teachers, which range from uncompromising worship to violent denunciation. Many other judgments are the uninformed opinions of people who have no understanding of the language of art. Although people show a tendency to prefer modern developments, they have been exposed to such violently conflicting opinions that they have not been able to formulate clearly the meaning of modern art for them. Since art requires the passage of time for an effective comparison, only future generations will be able to correctly evaluate the present movement. For these reasons, the picture becomes muddled, confused, and difficult for the layman to see comprehensively.

In this approach to the problem, if I avoid one-sided opinions wherever possible, I can lessen somewhat the subjectivity of the thinking about modern art and establish a saner approach to the basic problems by relying on the more objective evaluations of outstanding authorities. The logical place to begin the explanation of these problems would be to formulate a definition of art; however, since no philosopher has achieved a truly synoptic definition, you will appreciate its exceeding complexity. Yet, if we examine the various philosophers' definitions of art and analyze the purpose of art, we can arrive at

a workable definition. Then, by examining the creeds and work of modern artists, it can be shown whether they are satisfying or failing to satisfy that definition.

Furthermore, since modern art is not a spontaneous expression and has its roots deep in the past, we will examine the aims of modern artists as shown in their work and from their writings, lectures, and criticisms in order to relate their efforts to cultures and individuals from the past who felt and adhered to similar principles.

Then, too, the modern movement has taken many different forms of expression that will be accounted for. These developments will be grouped for convenience of study and examination into somewhat arbitrary schools (Cubist, Futurist, Symbolist) for clarification of the over-all picture which will make it easier for us to study the modern trends, although the majority of artists loathe being linked with a school.

And, finally, modern art will be related to contemporary life because it is an expression of that life. The life that accepted Greek mythologies is not our life. The technical and scientific advancements of our age have had great influence upon the arts, and, in turn, the results of modern art's development are seen all around us, in our advertising, industrial designing, and architecture. Curiously enough, the same public that condemns the source finds the expression of it in the design of free-form furniture, ceramics, and fabrics quite acceptable.

Therefore, whether people realize it or not, modern art is

influencing all forms of modern life. It only remains to be shown that misunderstanding is the cause of the suspicion of modern art. Just as the study of the classics has made them more understood and loved, so, too, would an intelligent approach to modern art render it more appreciated and understood. In the final analysis this appreciation, this emotional and mental development to a level of understanding is the responsibility of the individual. For the enjoyment of modern art depends on the ability of the individual to expand his own personality to a height of harmony with the artists' esthetic development.



## CHAPTER II

### THE PUZZLE OF MODERN ART

We have all seen them. We have all seen and wondered about those strange creations of cubes and squares; those women, half profile, half front view; those big, thick, rough oil paintings that are neither photographic nor pretty; those deformed and distorted subjects; those pictures with a few splashes of color and some scrambled lines; and those unrecognizable objects with recognizable names. What are they all about? What do the artists expect us, as laymen, to get out of them? Is our art a reflection of a mad world? Do modern artists distort because they can't draw? Are they trying to hoax the public, or is this development really art?

A little clear thinking will quickly eliminate the majority of these questions. The idea that the artists are mad is a demonstrable absurdity because a movement of such scope as to include the great muralists of Mexico, the expressionists of Germany, the futurists of Italy, the neo-plasticists of the Netherlands, the experimenters and leaders of France and their followers in every corner of the world could not be the product of mad men -- no, they can't all be mad. True, our world today is a little berserk, but the roots of modern art go much deeper than any contemporary madness. The activity which we call modern art is the art of the last seventy-five years that developed out of the so-called Impressionist movement in France. But

Impressionism did not just spring into being. It grew from solid French tradition in art, from the colorful romantic art of Delacroix, the romantic realism of Courbet and Daumier, the delicate naturalism of Corot, and the still deeper roots of the classical French tradition - Ingres, David and Poussin. It grew from them just as they in turn had grown from the classic masters before them, following the natural law of evolution in art, which traces back to the ancient Greeks and earlier.<sup>1</sup>

Out of Impressionism grew the giant leaders of the modern movement: Paul Cezanne, Georges Seurat, Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. Cezanne felt that the Impressionists, by their concentration on color and light, lost structure in their paintings, and through his search for order and form he became the father of modern art. His theories on picture building led to Cubism, Dadaism, Neo-Plasticism, and to the Purists, Kandinsky and Klee. Seurat's analytical mind probed in the same direction and furthered this development. Van Gogh felt that Impressionism lacked feeling, and his emotional outpourings led to the expressionistic wing of the moderns with whom the establishment of a mood predominates. Gauguin felt the need for purer color and simpler methods; thus, he led to the large decorative wing of the moderns by his primitive, symbolic, decorative paintings.<sup>2</sup>

1) R.H.Wilenski, "The Tree of Modern Art", Vanity Fair, May, 1933, p. 37

2) S.Cheney, A World History of Art, The Viking Press, New York, 1937, pp. 861 - 864

Then, if modern art is an evolution and a development from the past and not a reflection of a mad world, do the moderns abstract because they cannot draw? Is it because they do not serve the long tedious apprenticeships of the guilds of Flanders or the years with a drawing master as in the Renaissance? Does the rapidly moving world of today eliminate the time element necessary for the proper development of an artist? To arrive at the answer to this question let us look at two of the greater exponents of modern art; Pablo Picasso who has devoted his life to developing art forms and Henri Matisse who has concentrated on color and decoration.

Because his father was a drawing teacher, Picasso was disciplined early in the classics of art and became an accomplished craftsman in his teens. As a young man of twenty-five, Picasso was accepted by popular consent as a mature artist, and the technical discipline of his early years commanded the greatest respect. He had come to Paris in 1900 with a sound academic training and a mild reputation as an illustrator and set himself the task of emulating Toulouse-Lautrec, one of the greatest draftsmen of the French tradition.<sup>1</sup> In order to see how well he succeeded, look at the drawings of his blue period and at some of his early realistic portraits which illustrate his ability at literal rendering.

Matisse, too, was a brilliant draftsman as a young student.

1) F.R. Adams, "Young Master Picasso", Art News, October, 1947, p. 29, Volume XLVI, Number 8

While studying under Moreau, he earned money by copying Fragonard, Caracchi, Rafael, and other realists of the past. Many of his excellently executed copies were bought by the government. He was well liked by society because he was academic and was regarded as a rising young classicist.<sup>1</sup> Even when Matisse, in his later years, was developing his free, decorative style, Romm<sup>2</sup> says, "Matisse draws much and tirelessly from nature, his drawings run into the hundreds and as a draughtsman he is a real master".

Therefore, if these two masters went through the academic mill and then turned their attention to abstract expression, what was the compelling force? Was it the lust for gold, which, as in other fields of human endeavour, has frequently cropped up to determine the course an artist pursued? Did they find that a radically different style would bring large fees and fame?

Let us look once more at their history. Matisse, while still at the Beaux Arts in 1896 exhibited seven pictures at the Salon National. One painted in the style of the old Dutch masters was bought by the French Government. His work made an excellent impression on the leaders of society and he was elected an associate member of the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts. But he renounced the path to an easy career and easy fame, preferring the path of trial, struggle and the honor of satisfying his creative instinct. At first he did not have an easy time.

1) A. Romm, Matisse, Lear, New York, 1947, p. 27

2) Ibid., p. 66

The decade from 1895 - 1905 was the hardest in his life. He had no regular income and was often in want.<sup>1</sup>

Returning to Picasso we find that by 1905 he was proving himself in exquisite and expressive drawings as one of the greatest of modern draftsmen. He was beginning to find a market for his paintings, and the famous blue period was turning into the gayer rose period. Still, by 1907 Picasso had put aside the representative art and began launching the amazing abstract experiments of the following forty years.<sup>2</sup>

The early work of Matisse and Picasso wasn't accepted with popular acclaim, nor has the modern theme as a whole resulted in a lucrative market for the practitioners or widespread acceptance of their work. Typical reactions were the ones expressed by the critics and the public about the first modern art exhibition which was held at the 69th Street Armory, about thirty-five years ago. At this "International Exhibition of Modern Art" the Cubists, Rodin, Brancusi and many others had a terrific impact upon the public. The critics had open house, and their remarks about the artists are classics. Cezanne had "never quite learned his trade". Hartley had "contributed to the total destruction of the art of painting". Marin made the critic dizzy with his Woolworth Building. Matisse was "a painter of nightmares" and his were the "drawings of a naughty boy". Duchamps' "Nude Descending Stairs" created the greatest scandal. This experiment in presenting similar successive aspects

1) Ibid., pp. 27 - 28

2) S.Cheney, The Story of Modern Art, The Viking Press, New York, 1941, pp. 506 - 510

of objects in motion caused the "Art News" to offer a ten dollar prize for the best fifty word description of the location of the nude and the stairs.

Despite these reactions, by 1929 the Museum of Modern Art had dedicated itself to the modern movement. And today even the reserved old Metropolitan in New York City argues over paintings with the Modern Museum, claiming Cezannes and Van Goghs are not "modern" but belong to the permanent collections of the Metropolitan. The revolutionary today is familiar, Cezanne has been placed among the great. Matisse is a modern old master. Even Duchamps' famous nude has been outdone by high speed photography.

However, the expressions on the faces of the majority of the public when exposed to an example of modern art for the first time speak for themselves. They still think they are being hoaxed. Is it really sensible to believe that thousands of artists, all over the world, would continue a practical joke over a period that will soon approach a century? They may clown when they name their paintings because "Composition" or "Experiment No. 6" sound dull to a sales minded gallery owner. However, the majority of modern artists are men who are devoting their lives to serious, sincere study.

What are they trying to say? If the examples of Matisse and Picasso show that they can draw realistically but choose not to, that they gave up a chance of quick success for a long period of trial and error, that they devoted their lives to their beliefs

and today have attracted thousands of followers, is it not reasonable to accept the belief that modern artists have something valid to say? What is that something? What are they trying to do? Going further, what is art supposed to do?



### CHAPTER III

#### THE DEFINITION OF ART

[Mankind, we find, has always developed some form of artistic expression. Even the most primitive people of the earth decorated their utensils and drew on the walls of their caves, although they did not know enough to clothe or shelter themselves properly. Yet in all the years that art has been acknowledged in the world and in all the years that great minds have philosophized about the subject, a suitable definition that would be agreeable to all men has never been found. In all the years that this expression has been accepted as an integral phase of man's culture, man has never been able to clearly define it. Frequently the great philosophers contradict each other over "What is art?", or "What should art do?", because there is no process in art, no matter how important, which can safely be made into a formula. There is a quality in painting that cannot be explained. However, from Plato onward, many have recognized art as non-utilitarian and non-materialistic; its merits have not depended on its usefulness or the material gain it offered.<sup>1</sup> But the majority of definitions offered by these philosophers have invariably been too one-sided or too vague.

As great a thinker as Aristotle, for example, did not feel that there was a distinction between art and nature. He felt that

1) Paul G. Konody, "Art", Encyclopedia Britannica Company L.T.D., 1939, Vol. 2, pp. 440 - 443



art and nature moved on parallel lines, that essentially the form of art is an imitation of reality. It holds the mirror up to nature. There is in man a pleasure in imitation, apparently missing in the lower animals. There is also in Aristotle's philosophy a slight allowance for inward significance rather than surface appearances and for unity, form, and purification, but to him, the limitation is essentially nature.<sup>1</sup>

How could he squeeze art into so constrictive a definition? How could he explain the magnificence of the Gothic achievement, of the great Chinese culture, of Persian design, of Negro art, of the thousands of creative forces from the past as "mirrors to nature"? Even the Greek development was an attempt to outshine nature, to create the perfect form, to better nature's forms. How can the skilled copying of nature be compared to creation? There are many artists who have technical skill but lack the power of expression and their painstaking copies of nature are devoid of emotion, expression, rhythm and order. The greatest art in the world is not a colored photograph.

[Stites<sup>2</sup> quotes Plato as saying that art is a language which all nations can understand. But just as we cannot understand foreign spoken languages without specialized study, to that extent we cannot understand foreign art expressions. Such expressions as African sculpture or Persian symbolism have little meaning for strangers to those cultures.

1) R. McKeon, The Basic Works of Aristotle, Randome House, New York, 1941, p. 1025

2) R.S.Stites, The Arts and Man, McGraw Hill Book Co., New York, 1940, p. 124

Stites' own definition is that "art is an expression of the nature of man in significant patterns which tend to induce feelings for the Beautiful, the Energetic, and the Sublime....Art is the language of the soul". I doubt if Stites could explain satisfactorily "the nature of man", and every religious cult does not interpret the soul in the same way. A language from so intangible a source cannot take on any concrete form and would not take the same form for two different individuals.

Tolstoy<sup>2</sup> analyzes art as that which makes beauty manifest and beauty is that which pleases. The aim of art is beauty, and beauty is recognized by the enjoyment it gives. Art is to bring out of yourself a feeling you have experienced by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds or forms, and is a human activity in that one man consciously by means of certain external signs passes on to others feelings he has lived through so that others are effected by those feelings and also experience them.<sup>3</sup> Art therefore becomes a means of communication, transmitting feelings rather than thoughts.

Is such a hedonistic definition of beauty acceptable? Would a painting by Watteau or Boucher, the darlings of the French aristocrats of the eighteenth century, be considered beautiful by the revolutionaries? Would the same painting create equal enjoyment for a fifth avenue society matron and a slum dweller? Obviously not, especially if subject matter predominates. What is beauty?

1) R.S.Stites, The Arts and Man, McGraw Hill Book Co. Inc., New York, 1940, p. 12

2) L.Tolstoy, What is Art and Essays on Art, Oxford University Press, London, 1930, pp. 121 - 123

3) Ibid., p. 123

Is it what you see or what you feel? Too many believe that beauty in art resides in the beautiful subject. They forget that the same subject is not beautiful for all of us, that the standards of beauty vary with individual taste and with historical periods. Art cannot limit itself to one who becomes skilled in copying the beautiful subject. If this limitation became the standard of art, any slick illustrator would be considered greater than Michelangelo, El Greco, Van Gogh or the other powerful creators. If an artist is to express feelings, which are intangible, by means of movements, lines, and colors, must he do it realistically? Is it the subject or what is done with it? An artist can create just as harmonious and beautiful a painting from wharfs, docks, warehouses and slums as he can from a sunset over a lake. Going further, the artist can create beauty of lines, colors, spaces, textures and forms -- all of which exist independent of subject and can create feeling and response from an individual of any cultural environment. Beauty, however, in itself is too limiting a concept to allow for the full expression of art. One of the most frequently used subjects in art is "Christ on the Cross". Yet, is a man nailed to a cross beautiful if separated from its mental associations? Neither is Picasso's "Guernica Mural" beautiful, for the story it tells is not a lovely one. Art deals with feelings and emotions the overall aspects of which include more than beautiful subjects.

An illustration of how a catchy jingle of words can add to confusion is the following couplet:

"True wit (art) is but nature to advantage dressed,  
What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed".

Pope, An Essay on Criticism, Part II, LL 297 - 298

How can "what was thought" and "nature" stand for the same thing and "to advantage dressed" may stand for anything.

[Van Loon<sup>1</sup> writes in The Arts that "Art is Universal", and it is not bound to any particular country or to any particular period of time. Art is as old as the human race, and every race, no matter how primitive, has developed a form of artistic expression. "Man, even at his proudest moments is a puny and helpless creature when he compares himself to the gods, for the gods speak unto him through creation. Man tries to answer, he tries to vindicate himself, and that answer, that vindication, is really what we call art."

Despite the eloquence of his definition does it really explain what art is or does it approach the mysterious, intangible definition of life itself?

Some wax poetic as does Santayana<sup>2</sup> when he says, "All invention is tentative, all art experimental, and to be sought like salvation with fear and trembling....Art in its nobler acceptance is an achievement, not an indulgence. It prepares the world in some sense to receive the soul and the soul to master the world; it disentangles those threads in each that can be woven into the other".

Santayana's theory is that art is a form of objectified pleasure. That in science one observes and studies results and

1) H.W. Van Loon, The Arts, Simon Schuster, New York, 1937, p.4,6  
2) G. Santayana, The Philosophy of Santayana, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1936, pp. 220, 251, 254, 255

conditions, but in art one can be free and creative. Art springs from the heart of man reaching the heart of nature, co-operating with her, becoming a parcel of her creative, material energy, building by her instinctive hand.

A lot of his philosophy on art is evasive and vague; the relation of art to the soul and the guidance of nature's "instinctive hand" are difficult to tie down. Two phrases, "all art experimental" and "in art one can be free and creative", however, should be well remembered.

And some writers give art an unconscious attribute. Robb and Garrison<sup>1</sup> write that "art is the representation in comprehensible form of the truth revealed to the artist by his unconscious analysis of experience....Art is the unconscious working of the artist's temperament".

Can we say that Cezanne, who spent a lifetime ploddingly working out color relationships, planes, depth, and form in his paintings, or the Chinese artist, who sat and contemplated for days before he felt he had worked out in his mind exactly what he wanted to say and just how to say it, were making an unconscious analysis?

Some recognize the intangibility of their subject like Benedette Cross who once opened a book with this definition: "Art is what everybody knows it is." So, after years of wrestling with the subject, this great esthetician summed up his impatience and his doubts. However, there is a great deal

1) D. N. Robb and J. J. Garrison, Art in the Western World, Harper Brothers Inc., New York and London, revised edition, 1935, 1942, p. 6

of wisdom in the statement, for it grants that all men feel what art is intuitively, but it is useless to attempt to intellectualize about it.<sup>1</sup>

[Elie Faure,] in the same vein, [writes that art, which expresses life, is as mysterious as life. It escapes all formulas as does life.<sup>2</sup> But realizing man's need for definitions, he writes, "art is a sign, no doubt, a way of speaking. A language, a language that differs from another similar language according to the man who speaks it, according to the place, according to the epoch in which he speaks it and, also let us note clearly, according to the man who hears it".<sup>3</sup>

Underlying most of these ideas as to what art should be, we find one main theme: that the identification of art with representation of nature or with the beautiful in nature is completely false. Art is an interpretation. Art begins where the artist departs from a strict imitation of nature. Nature may give inspiration but the artist imposes order, organization and discipline to an untamed, unorganized mass. The laws of art are not the laws of nature because there are problems in form, color, rhythm, design and expression of feeling that only the artist can work out. That is why an El Greco, or a Michelangelo, or a Botticelli, or a Tintoretto, or a Cezanne, or a Picasso are greater art than a photograph which can select but cannot impose upon nature this rhythm, design, feel-

1) S.Cheney, Expressionism in Art, Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York, 1934, p. 45

2) Elie Faure, Ancient Art, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1921, Introduction XVII

3) Elie Faure, The Spirit of the Forms, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1930, p. 210



ing and order.<sup>1</sup>

So, to work out our definition of art, let us see what great works of art have in common. What do Keats, a Gothic Cathedral, a Giotto fresco, a Chinese landscape, a Michelangelo sculpture, a painting by El Greco, Renoir, Van Gogh or Cezanne have in common? How do they differ from one of nature's forms?

Basically they are creative, and it is certain that the esthetic principles of the great philosophers (Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, for example) served to develop their desire for an art of pure creation.<sup>2</sup>

Our first point, therefore, is that they are creative, not imitative. They are something made by man through his limitations and abilities, but they are his interpretations, not copies of something that existed before.

Second, they are an expression on the part of the artist, his feeling about something. Whether it is Rembrandt philosophizing about mankind or the Gothic expression of religion, they all feel something above and beyond a "mirror to nature".

Third, they are esthetic. Again philosophers have wrangled over the meaning of that word, but I mean that they appreciate the principles underlying beauty and taste. They suggest order, good feeling and artistic culture.

Fourth, they reflect the thinking and life of their own era: Keat's romanticism, Giotto's religious era, and Renoir's

1) Konody, op. cit., p. 441

2) Maurice Raynal, Modern French Painters, Brentano's Publisher, New York, 1928, p. 53

scientific knowledge of broken color, all stem from and reflect their own period and culture pattern. They are said within the range of experience of the artist, within his conditioning and knowledge. Giotto did not know about scientific perspective, El Greco did not know about scientific theories of color and light, and the builders of the Gothic cathedrals did not know about structural steel.

Fifth, they all express their own medium: Van Gogh's work expresses the thickness of oil paint, Michelangelo's sculpture expresses the power of stone, and Keats created masterpieces within the limitations of his language. Therefore, to arrive at our working definition of art, we can incorporate the qualities which we have discussed into an extremely pliable phrase because there are no standards in art nor rules for creation that will be acceptable to everyone for all time. Just as the standards of science change, so do the standards of art. With new thoughts, new eras, the approach to art changes. This constant revaluation rediscovers forgotten names, as was the case with El Greco, and adds them to the great masters. Others, like Murillo, who held the spotlight for centuries, drop into obscurity.<sup>1</sup>

Even science cannot help in the evaluation, for science cannot explain why one man is pleased by a thing and another is not. It cannot, without contradiction, tell what art is.

Tentatively, let us say that art is a creative, esthetic expression of human experience, said through a certain art medium

1) Sheldon Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art, The Viking Press, New York, 1924, p. 308 - 309



and conditioned by the era in which it is said. }

of the new concept that nature's forms are not art forms.

"Taste", he said, "is the best judge. It is rare. The artist can only appeal to an extremely restricted number of people."<sup>1</sup>

"Let us go out and study beautiful nature, let us try to discover her spirit. Then let us express ourselves according to our own temperaments."<sup>2</sup>

[Cezanne's search for forms, receding planes, depth, and the "realization" of his canvas formulated the theories and trends of a large part of the modern movement. He attempted to reduce the forms of nature in order to help develop form in his paintings and to perfect coloring which would enhance the feeling of form and space. This reworking of nature's forms to create art forms was never revealed so clearly in previous painting.]

Van Gogh's paintings are an example of emotional expression. They are himself poured out. Because the eccentric and more lurid side of his life has been overemphasized by a sensation loving people, the deeper, more sensitive, beautiful part of his personality remains unknown to many.

By the following quotes from his letters to his brother Theo, the one man who understood, encouraged, supported and loved him, some of his thoughts on art can be developed.

While studying for the ministry, he started sketching, and a remark he made about art put a finger on the essence

1) Ibid., p. 378

2) Ibid., p. 381

of his subject:

"The other day I made a little drawing...How I like this work. I am glad you find things that feed the inner life. For this is what great art does...."<sup>1</sup>

Later when he was devoting all his time to art he wrote, "At bottom nature and a true artist agree. But nature certainly is "intangible"...If one draws a willow as if it were a living being, and it really is so after all...."<sup>2</sup>

"After all I find in my work an echo of what struck me. I see that nature has told me something, has spoken to me, and that I have put it down in shorthand. In my shorthand, there may be words that cannot be deciphered. There may be mistakes or gaps, but there is something in it of what wood or beech or figure has told me, and it is not a tame or conventional language...."<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps one of his finest observations and comments on the difference between one who looks and one who sees was his letter about the following episode:

"You remember van der Weele came to see me this winter. I was then making studies of diggers...they didn't seem to interest him...But for his large picture he has had diggers pose for him, he has observed them while they were at work; in fact he has closely studied diggers from nature. Now, in looking over my studies... he spoke quite differently about them...More and more I begin

1) Irving Stone, Dear Theo, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1937, p. 32

2) Ibid., p. 63

3) Ibid., p. 178

to notice in myself as well as in others how often one is mistaken in thinking that this or that "is not correct".<sup>1</sup>

And these last quotes from his letters will perhaps as clearly as anything I could say, show you why Van Gogh and so many of the moderns draw freely and expressively, why so many prefer to distort and exaggerate rather than to draw exactly. He was defending his technique against the exactness of the academy artists when he said:

"To paint direct from life means to live in those cottages day by day, to be in the fields as the peasants, in summer to stand the heat of the sun, in winter to suffer from snow and frost...A drawing of a peasant woman by a Parisian who has learned drawing at the academy will always indicate the limbs and the structure in the self same way, sometimes charming -- correct in proportion and anatomy...But when Daumier or Delacroix draw a figure the shape is felt more. The proportions may be arbitrary, the anatomy and structure wrong, but the figure lives."<sup>2</sup>

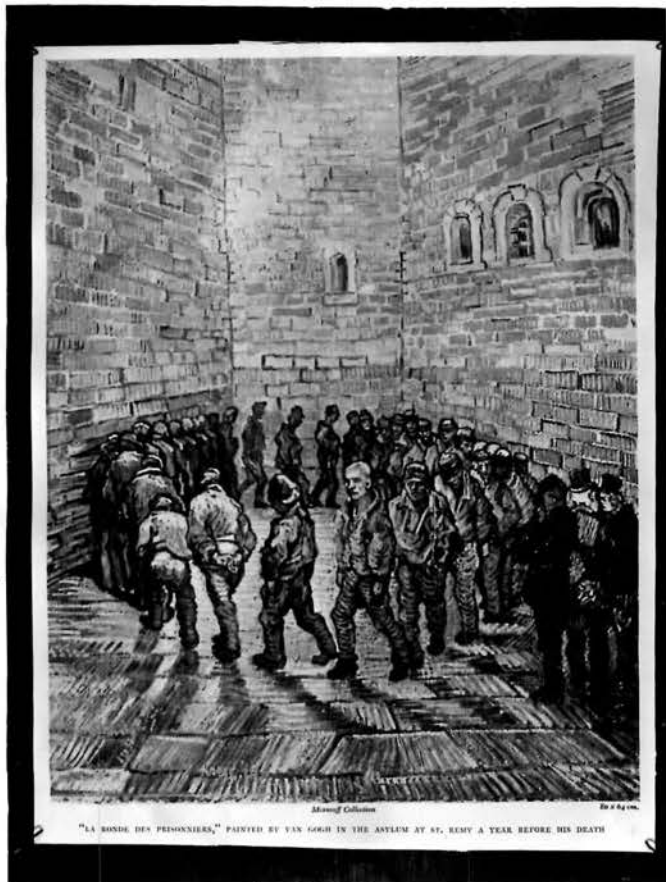
"The peasant must be a peasant, the digger must dig...If one photographed a digger he certainly would not appear to be digging. ...of Michelangelo...the legs are undoubtedly too long, the hips and backsides too large...These incorrectnesses, deviations, remodellings, changes of reality...are more true than the literal truth."<sup>3</sup>

1) Ibid., p. 224

2) Ibid., p. 354

3) Ibid., p. 356

And one just has to look at the illustration of Van Gogh's prison scene to see how he creates a mood that no realist could, how he has captured the feeling of doomed men, hardened by society, shut in and embittered.



"Art is an expression on the part of the artist."

Henri Matisse is considered by many critics to be the greatest decorative painter in the world today, and one of the greatest colorists of our time. He explains well his reasons for abandoning realistic art and literal rendering.

"I have always tried to hide my own efforts and wished my

work to have the lightness and joyousness of a springtime which never lets anyone suspect the labors it has cost."<sup>1</sup>

I want my paintings to give quiet and rest to the fatigued and overworked man.<sup>2</sup> In a picture there must be nothing that can be described in words or that already exists in our memory ...A picture is a real organism or it is nothing...When I see a picture I forget what it represents, all that is important is line, form, and colors...."<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, we can understand why his paintings avoid exciting themes, excite no strong emotion, and necessitate no deep thought, but are of highly decorative patterns. His motifs are derived from models or studio objects. He derives his strongest influence from the decorative art of the Persians. His work is different from that of Cezanne, different from that of Van Gogh, but it certainly satisfies the creative, esthetic ideal.

André Derain<sup>4</sup>, when asked what art should do, replied "The point is not to reproduce an object, but the virtue of that object, in the old sense of the word."

Juan Gris<sup>5</sup> has been one of the founders of the Cubist movement. He describes his esthetic spirit as follows: "I work with the elements of the spirit". He wrote in 1921 to L'Esprit Nouveau, "I work with imagination: I try to give concrete form

1) Letter to Henry Clifford, Curator of Painting, Philadelphia Museum, Published New York Times, Sunday, April 4, 1948

2) Romm, op. cit., p. 8

3) Ibid., p. 48

4) Raynal, op. cit., p. 70 - 71

5) Ibid., p. 93

to what is abstract...."

"If in theory I disclaim all idealistic or naturalistic art, in method I always return to the Louvre; my method is the method of all time, the method employed by the masters: it is a matter of principles, and principles are constant."

In his work it is not the subject which governs the picture because he works with plastic metaphors. Just as we say "a sheet of paper" or "the foot of the table", or correlate up-raised eyes with an expression of faith, we borrow from two different objects the resources necessary to construct a third one. Similarly, Gris feels that several groups of parallel elements are necessary to the general harmony of his picture. The spectator is invited by Gris to his own interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

Marc Chagall<sup>2</sup> writes, "From my earliest youth I have been opposed to that artistic profession of painting which has no higher purpose than to decorate the walls of an apartment.... I have wanted to...give concrete and human form to man's impotence in the face of nature...to create an expression parallel to hers. We each have our own personality and we must have the courage to exteriorize it...I like to remember that I come from the people...No single esthetic tendency satisfies me."

And so Chagall's art follows no one school. It is an imaginative, dreamlike, charming type of art, that reflects Jewish folklore and his longing for the small Russian town

1) Ibid., pp. 98 - 99

2) Ibid., pp. 55 - 57

where he was born. His people often float through the air. He draws angels, peasants, fish, birds, violins, pigs and cows superimposed because that is the way we remember and the way we dream. Sometimes his forms are personal symbols but his paintings have a childlike, beautifully colored, gayly creative feeling.

Georges Braque<sup>1</sup> established Cubism in conjunction with Picasso and continued on in this method, to become known as the "classic of cubism". His thoughts on painting should help clarify the cubist technique:

"In art, progress lies not in an extension but in a knowledge of limitations...The limitations of a method secure its style, engender a new form and lead to creation...Limited methods often constitute the charm and power of primitive painting. Extension of methods, on the contrary, causes the decadence of the arts.

"The subject is not the object of painting, but a new unity, the lyricism that results from the mastery of a method...The aim of painting is not to reconstruct an anecdotic fact, but to constitute a pictorial fact. We must not imitate what we want to create...If it is to be pure imitation, painting must omit the aspects of what it imitates.

"The senses deform, the spirit forms...I like the rule, the discipline, which controls and corrects emotion."

His ideas on creating, on searching for the aspect of his subject and disciplining himself to the rules of a method are

1) Ibid., pp. 50 - 52



extremely important to help one understand cubism. Picasso<sup>1</sup> further clarifies cubism by suggesting that cubism is a language, but it is not a language for the ordinary communication of ideas or information or the ordinary human emotions. Rather, it is a language peculiar to art, -- "an art", as Picasso puts it, "dealing primarily with forms".

The foregoing group are a very small sampling of the many artists in the modern school. I have brought in one man searching for form, another emphasizing expressionism, one from the decorative wing, a few who work with symbols and forms of surrealism, and one who is an exponent of cubism. I have attempted to show that the intangible, the creative meaning that was underneath the majority of the classical definitions of art also underlies the thinking and painting of these contemporary artists. They have taken many different courses but certainly the scope of human experience is broad enough to embrace them all.

1) Alfred H. Barr, Picasso, Forty Years of His Art, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1946, p. 84

(2)

CHAPTER V  
THE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING  
"NOTHING COMES FROM NOTHING"

This world of ours has seen many extremely varied cultures. Cultures that differed as much as the Gothic and Greek, the Primitive and Renaissance, or the Far Eastern and Western. These cultures, however, are directly comparable because the things all cultures do are basically the same despite the apparently vast differences of their surface manifestations. Even the pattern that is followed by man today was followed by the most primitive of tribes.<sup>1</sup>

Humans have always mated, worked out ways of communicating, provided themselves with tools and weapons, developed mythologies and sciences, and looked for comfort, food, shelter and dress. Humans have always worked out sex taboos, social customs, methods of treating the dead, ways of rearing children, and systems of sport. They have always rewarded valor, acknowledged prestige in a group, developed laws to regulate themselves, although never quite successfully, because humans have always waged war!

These things have been basic to every culture pattern, and in every pattern a means of creative expression has been developed. The lowest savages, who in some ways were inferior to the animals that surrounded them, who never learned how to build good homes or to dress properly, or how to bring the

1) Clark Wissler, Man and Culture, Thomas Crowell Co., New York, 1923, Chapter V

basic comforts to their lives, had developed interesting art forms. No group of natives, however primitive, has ever been discovered that did not have an artistic talent.

Humans, therefore, have always done basically the same things. The thing that changes is the means. They do these basic things in different ways. Some matrimonial plans were carried out with a club, others through a parent's decision, and still others through love. Some cultures communicated by smoke signals, some by drums, and some others by wireless. Some cultures carried mythologies and religious fervor to high peaks as did the Primitive cultures or the Gothic and Low Renaissance periods. Other cultures probed into science and learning, and the predominance of mythological and religious beliefs gave way to material developments. The Greek, High Renaissance and Modern cultures typify this intellectual probing. Sometimes the difference in doing the basic thing is an obvious evolution: the primitive technique of cutting a "v" shaped scar on an arm to reward battle valor has become the current practice of awarding chevrons to show military advancement. Sometimes the means is entirely different. The form this means takes is determined by society, which is a powerful, overwhelming force. Even so strong an emotion as motherhood is taught and controlled, to a large extent, by society. Such a statement may seem startling and cause opposition but many examples will justify this viewpoint. The Spartans condoned exposing babies to the elements to weed out

the weak ones. Many American Indian tribes immersed newly born babies into ice cold streams to insure the survival of the strongest. Some tribes gave the children to the grandparents to raise so the parents, who were young and strong, could work the fields and fight when necessary. In our own age, Hitler quickly succeeded in promoting the idea of turning selected babies over to the state. Every newspaper gives numerous examples of the killing or abandoning of illegitimate children because the shame inflicted by society outweighs the emotion of motherhood. Therefore the means which each basic thing takes is shaped by its culture pattern and so, too, is the type of art of each culture.

Primitive man, a child on earth, developed a childlike art. He was uninfluenced by any previous ways of working, by any theories, or by any science. His culture had none. But he knew well the animals among which he lived and he drew them well.

The early world cultures of Assyria and Babylonia lived a life of kill or be killed. Their art was obsessed by wars, tortures and pain. The artists worked for the king so that a lot of their art was a means of propaganda, glorifying the king.

In Egypt the priests controlled the arts as they did society. Shut off from the world, with no outside influences century after century, these artists developed a oneness and a similarity in their art. It was a great art, but lacked

the lyrical qualities and warmth of a popular art which stems from the people.

The Greeks, by contrast, were in contact with the world and created a universal art. They carried their culture pattern of thinking man and intellectualism into their art. They developed perfect proportion and perfect symmetry. There was no mystery or vagueness in their art for there was none in their life. Even their gods were created as glorified humans.

In the Far East the wisdom of those wonderful people caused them to seek the essence, the spirit, and the mystical quality of life. They developed a great mass of art that reflected the quietude and contemplation of the soul as compared to the objective, fact seeking western mind.

The culture pattern of India developed a strong belief that the soul is the only reality. By showing allegiance to the world you delayed your return to the source. So an art developed that shunned the visible world. They avoided anatomical accuracy in their sculpture and purposely distorted and abstracted.

Persian culture put a taboo on images. Their artists were forbidden by Mohammedan beliefs to use human forms. They therefore turned to decoration and developed geometric patterns into arabesque designs which are considered the greatest decorative art of all time.

The wandering, warring tribes of the dark ages developed an art expression in little things that could be carried with

them. They carved bracelets, swords, and shields, having neither the time nor the place to do large sculpture or painting.

The wonderful cathedrals of the Gothic Age are a manifestation of the tremendous religious feeling of the period. They were a symbol of hope, order and light in a dark, disordered world, and the people poured their money and talents into them. That same religious feeling shaped the art of the first great western painters, Giotto and Fra Angelico.

Then the rebirth of learning and the intellectualism of the Renaissance period turned the artists from the religious to the scientific aspect of painting. They developed perspective, anatomy, oil painting, life like portraiture, and led to the realism of Donatello and the scientific formulas of Leonardo Da Vinci.

The color of Venice and the wealth of that thriving sixteenth century city led to the color and luxurious quality of the paintings of Titian, Giorgione, and Tintoretto.

Catholic Spain prohibited free expression to artists and directed them to expressively interpret religious beliefs. This was greatly reflected in the work of El Greco.

In Flanders, the long apprenticeship system in the guilds and their strict standards developed the sound craftsmen and minute renderers of Flemish art.

All through history we can trace how art and the individual grow out of the life and culture pattern that surrounds them. Of

course there are always individual geniuses who far outshine their environment and their school: men like Michelangelo, who combined the science of his period with religion and creation; like Rembrandt, who threw aside the corporation painting technique of the guild artists to study space and light and dark; like Brueghel, who took the minute rendering technique of the Flemish artists and worked it into an organized whole; like Vermeer, Tintoretto, Durer, Cezanne and many others. They were usually in revolt against the large movement or else had the ability to take the path of their own culture pattern and do great things with it. But by and large the great art development of any period is usually a direct outgrowth of its pattern.

Now, what of our art and our culture pattern? [Modern art reflects our own age, our time of speed and space and science. Science opened up the possibilities of color with the discovery of the spectrum and the new understanding of how light refractions altered color. The Impressionists used this knowledge to attain more brilliance by putting pure colors side by side and allowing the eye to merge them into a third color. Science opened up new possibilities of form with space-time concepts. Artists have used this knowledge to develop three-dimensional paintings and moving art forms. The advancements in the understanding of our human mechanism have opened up the complexities of introversion. To understand the development of our art we must understand the advancements of our culture pattern that influence the artist's thoughts. For modern art is an outgrowth of our culture, and the difficulties of understanding it are



also the difficulties of understanding our culture. How many can understand Einstein? How many know how radar works or how television works or how a telephone works? How many can explain the atomic theory? How many know how glass is made or how the plates they eat from are made? Ask those around you. It will amaze you to discover how little the average person knows about any of the advancements of our age. Only experts in each field have a sufficient understanding of these things. This is an age of science. The experiments of the artists are only one phase of the vast experiments going on around us, and it is only natural that the artist should experiment. The lack of understanding of the modern art development can be explained by pointing out that a progressing art, as all progressing movements, must be in advance of its audience. It is up to the audience, if they want to understand, to study and keep up with the new developments being made. One must earn by great effort the ability to discuss freely modern scientific advancements, and so too one must earn the ability to understand the advancements in art. Appreciation usually follows understanding.

Modern art does not try to tell a story as art did in former times. When few could read and printing presses were unknown, the artists recorded the exploits and conquests of their kings; myths and stories were carved into rock; the stories of the Bible were painted on the walls of churches. Art does not serve that function today. The artist today leaves history to the historian and stories to the storyteller. He is more interested in creating a mood. Even when the great Mexican mural-



ists depict the struggle of their people, they interpret that struggle through the modern theories of picture making. Some artists completely discard subject matter and create a symphony of color and form that one enjoys for the color and form alone. Others use subject matter one can recognize but elongate, distort, or use certain colors to recreate a feeling rather than to recreate a scene.

There is a similarity here to the relation of music and poetry. In their early stages the two were linked and poetry was invariably sung. Today they are mainly separate. We don't need words to evoke a feeling. When songs do have words we are sometimes disturbed for they interfere with our enjoyment of the music. And certainly few opera lovers can understand the words being sung. We don't need real objects to raise an emotional response. Music creates a mood due to associations of sounds which are heavy or light, swift or slow, abrupt or smooth. Even when a musician does use a literal title, as in "Lullaby of Broadway", he doesn't reproduce actual sounds but creates his mood through the association of recognizable sound patterns.

So too, in art we associate feelings with colors. Black invariably suggests death; blue, coolness; white, purity; red, warmth; because that is the environment we usually see those colors in: the black at a funeral, the blue of water, the red of fire, and white at a wedding. Associations like these and the play of color forms can start creating moods and feelings independent of subject matter. In music our ears have been

trained not to listen for familiar sounds but in art our eyes still look for familiar objects.

[Modern art does not try to reproduce nature photographically.) The art of realism had been exploited to its fullest possibilities by the camera eye technique of the Renaissance painter Moroni, by the nineteenth century French artists David and Ingres, by the Flemish masters, and many others. Artists struggled for centuries with perspective, anatomy, modeling with light and dark, and draftsmanship. When these techniques are mastered, should that be the end of art? Scientists do not repeat experiments over and over again. Even when one draws to the best of his ability the camera proves him inaccurate. [Modern artists leave such absolute rendering as rain on a rose petal to the photographer who can do it greater justice. The artist uses his freedom to create his own colors and forms, and to establish principles of color harmony and balance that the camera can never equal.] As shown earlier [the belief that most modern masters cannot draw is not true. They have advanced far beyond literal rendering. As in music, we all admire someone who can play well, but how much more do we admire the composer! Today the feeling is prevalent that the forms of nature are not art forms. When you limit yourself to natural forms you limit your creativeness. Since the problem of the artist is far different from nature's he has the right to create his own forms and shapes.

Modern art attempts to tell you all that the artist knows and feels about a subject. It attempts to penetrate into the

deeper psychological meanings and the more complete statements of the study. We have all experienced receiving a certain impression when meeting someone for the first time and having that impression change as we learn to know them. The pretty girl is no longer pretty because we see her empty head. The man who wasn't so broad, large or handsome takes on larger proportions as we get to know his deep understanding and sensitive nature. Which impression would the camera register? Which tells more about the subject? Furthermore, do we ever see a person perfectly still? He moves and turns, and if an artist wants to draw several views of a person in one painting he has a right to do so. In the same philosophy, when a person moves we don't see him as a hard outline. Therefore some artists leave a vague, misty outline around their subject, for life isn't very definite, neither does it stand still. Let us try some experiments to make my meaning clear. If you focus your eyes on an object, that object is seen very clearly. But are the objects all around it seen clearly, or are they vague and misty? Therefore if an artist paints everything clearly, he distorts a natural phenomenon.] Do we actually see lines in nature? Are there any lines? Look at your hand. It seems to have a very definite outline. Yet move it slightly. The outline is only the last thing you see of a solid form as it turns out of sight. Leonardo Da Vinci was one of the first artists to say "There are no lines in nature". Paul Cezanne spent his life searching for the realization of this form. Think of these

things when you look at modern art. Look at some of the sculpture of Jacob Epstein to see how one can put so much more into a portrait than the surface features. Look at Velazquez's study of Pope Innocent X and you will see why the Pope winced and said, "too true", when he saw it for the first time. Many artists make studies of their subject from every conceivable position and then, when composing the final painting, tell all they know about their subject, resolving their knowledge into theories of color harmony, balance and form. This psychological insight and profound thought is a strong current of modern art. It is a strong current of modern life.

[Modern art attempts to penetrate into the deeper meanings of life which one thinks about when alone.] What is life? How can we conceive a timeless universe of infinite time and space? We are so limited and confined and frustrated, set in our tiny section of the earth for perhaps a span of seventy years. According to our scientists, if we traveled at the speed of light, 186,000 miles a second, we wouldn't live long enough to travel from one end of the milky way to the other. Think of the whole cosmos. What lies beyond? The more we learn the more we want to know. Our science is constantly opening up more and more avenues of interest. Our life is far too short to explore all possible avenues of knowledge. In this atmosphere of a probing culture pattern how can an artist confine his attention to illustrating only things that he sees? Only an artist with a very limited mentality would be content to end there.

And what of the human relationships that stem from our

culture pattern? Look at all the frustrated, neurotic people around us. If the increasing divorce rate indicates that we can't solve relationships between two people, what hope have we of solving the problems between nations? Life seems to be all disorder and confusion. How do man's continually crude actions influence the artist? Some cry out against it, as did Picasso in his "Guernica" mural. Once the symbols are explained (see Chapter VIII) you will never forget its meaning. Men like Gropper, Grosz, Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiras become socially meaningful artists, fighting and exposing corruption and greed. <sup>Some</sup> Other artists attempt to discover order and principles and to teach the qualities of life and the way life should be lived. Through keener senses they can teach the appreciation of beauty and the values of life. They let you see as they saw and feel as they felt.)

[Modern art attempts to express the medium with which the artist is working. Stone is left stonelike in quality, wood emphasizes the grain and texture of wood, oil paintings are thick and watercolors look wet. That is why the modern school criticizes the phase of Rodin's sculpture that turns stone into flesh. That is why they do not see artistic quality in the ultra-realistic busts and paintings of many Renaissance artists.

Modern art emphasizes creativeness and the individual artist's feelings about his subject. Creativeness can become a catch-all to cover everything done, good and bad. It leaves room for imitators and fakers, but this will be, in art as elsewhere. By true creativeness I mean that after the artist has

mastered draftsmanship and the theories and techniques of art he should be free to search for an individual way of expressing himself. The slow and painful process necessary to develop an artist must not be by-passed, but once an artist has matured he should be allowed to follow an individual path. After he enters that path do we have the right to say, for example, that Chagall's paintings of dreamlike memories of his early childhood are not art? Are floating figures so different from the portrayal of Greek mythologies or of angels; subjects that never existed on this earth and are just as abstract a thought. If some artists want to work in pure color to create moods as in music; if some want to develop symbols to represent thoughts; if some want to intellectualize on form and color; if some want to express great emotion; if some want to draw decoratively; there certainly is room enough in the art world for these people.

When we think back over the definitions of art we find no one clear definition. When we think in terms of "what art should do" we get more definite answers. I think we will all agree more or less on the following: art should be the feeling of the artist about something, should express the medium used, should be creative, should reflect the life of its time, should give the mood and feeling of the subject, should be esthetic, and should show the order and values possible in the world by representing an ordered existence or crying out against the disorder.

Now if art is to do all or part of these things, be crea-



tive, reflect out times, and the others, how can the artist be photographic? How can he be realistic and limit himself to making glass look like glass? This limitation violates the basic principles of what art should be and do in our time.

Our age is an age that has seen the oneness of religious beliefs shattered by many philosophies and by many disbelievers. We have no one all-powerful dictator. Moral codes are no longer a cut and dried pattern. Guilds and art directors no longer develop a one way of working among artists. Art has become an individualistic struggle among artists to express themselves. This is the basic problem of the "free man" of our age. This is the big development of our culture pattern, and the reason modern art has become so complex an expression. Our artists are in touch with every new experiment and philosophy that springs up anywhere in the world. Thousands of freely creating individuals can produce a vast and broad range of art as compared with thousands of artists working under the dictates of one priest or one formula. Among free people there must be free thinkers. ]

Remember the wise words of Redon who once said, "Nothing comes from nothing....Each painting or sculpture is both effect and cause".<sup>1</sup>

1) Pach, op. cit., p. 102

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TIMELESS ASPECTS OF MODERN ART

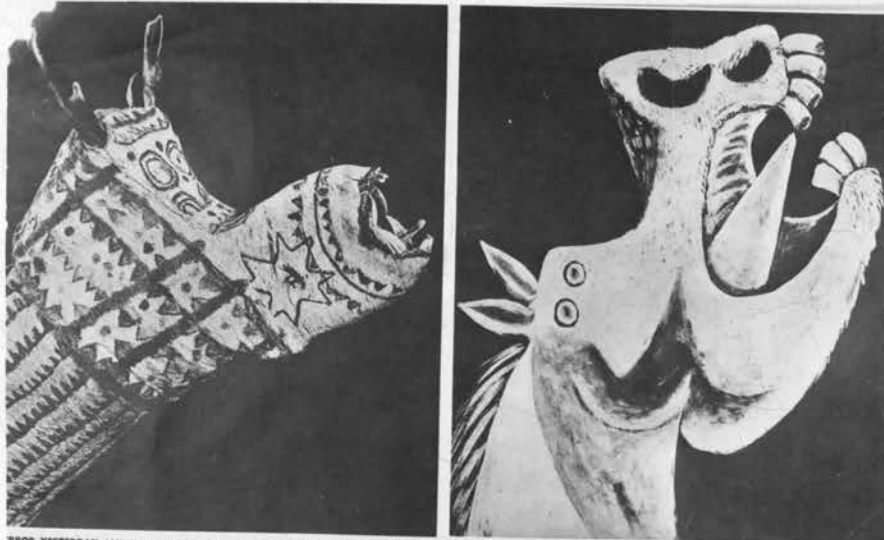
The development that we classify as modern art is not an isolated incident. It has never been practiced on so broad a scale, but it has many counterparts in the past. I have always been fascinated, when studying the history of art, by constantly finding examples that are so close in feeling to the modern examples of distortion and abstraction. Sometimes this is due to the same emotional feeling that influenced the ancient as well as the modern artist, sometimes perhaps to coincidence, but there are so many examples that it becomes increasingly evident that modern art, although reflecting a great deal of contemporary thought, is a way of working that manifested itself whenever similar thought patterns appeared in the past.

While searching for examples to illustrate this fact, I was delighted to read of the Twentieth Anniversary Exhibit of the Museum of Modern Art. Their exhibit, "The Timeless Aspects of Modern Art", was an attempt to show that the exaggeration, distortion, and abstraction of modern art to express certain ideas and feelings have precedents in the past. That similarity of feeling produced similar expressions. When an artist was interested primarily in expressing his feelings and ideas, a common way of expressing this emotion existed in all periods and in all places as we can see through a few of the museum examples.

A Panamanian deer's head mask, used with Indian ceremonials,



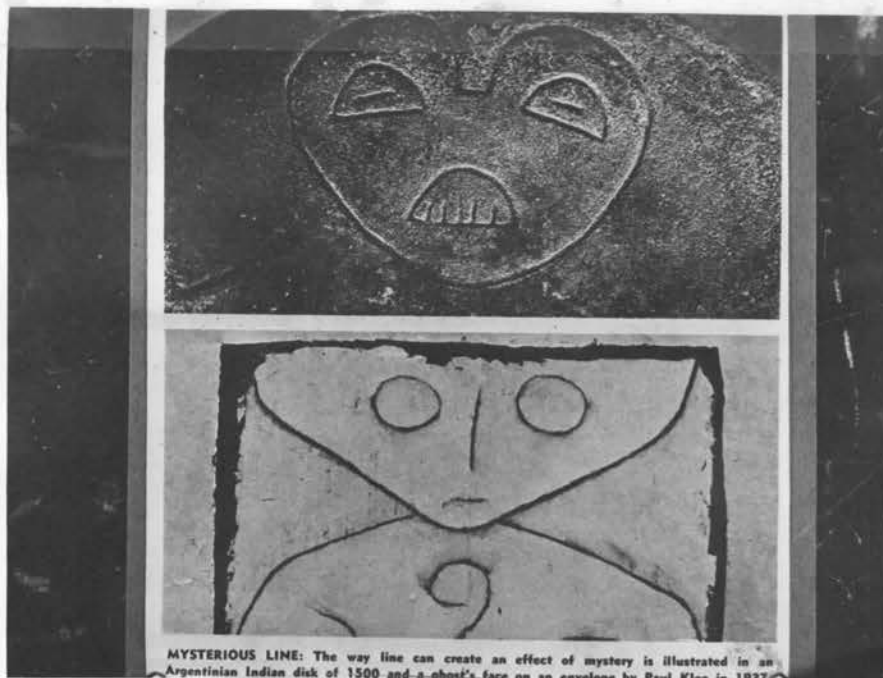
was compared to Picasso's sketch of a horse in the bombing of Guernica to show how similar devices were used to create frightening effects.



ERROR YESTERDAY AND TODAY: The Modern Museum places a Panamanian deer's head next to Picasso's sketch of a horse in the bombing of Guernica to show how similar devices were used to create frightening effects. Such juxtapositions attempt to prove the timelessness of certain seemingly strange aspects of modern art.

A small Etruscan bronze of about 600 B.C. and the over-life size youth by William Lehmbruck, made in 1913, show how elongation has been used for emotional effect. One to present the stalwart courage of a warrior, the other the introspective isolation of modern man.

A small painting by Paul Klee of a ghostly face on an envelope, drawn in line to create a mysterious effect, has a counterpart in an Argentinian Indian disk of 1500.



MYSTERIOUS LINE: The way line can create an effect of mystery is illustrated in an Argentinian Indian disk of 1500 and a ghost's face on an envelope by Paul Klee in 1937.

A mobile sculpture by Alexander Calder is compared to the work of a fifteenth century artisan in Columbia who wired tiny fragments of gold together in a somewhat similar way.

A Miro painting with its funny little shapes resembled the curious figures of an eleventh century Mayan bowl.

A head by Modigliani, done in 1915, was paired with a Micronesian mask, to show that the elongation and simplification by modern artists have age-old precedents.

A Madonna by ninth-century Christian Copts in Syria or Egypt was paired with a 1932 painting of Christ by Rouault to show how an impression of spiritual solemnity is often achieved by simplification and by enlargement of the head and eyes.



ELIGION THEN AND NOW: To show how an impression of spiritual solemnity is often  
bieved by simplification and by enlargement of head and eyes, the museum hangs an ivory

Madonna by sixth-century Christian Copts in Syria or Egypt with a 1932 painting of C  
by Russell. In the same gallery is a similar wooden crucifix from twelfth-century S

A stylized likeness of a horse is shown in the geometric forms of a Greek bronze from 800 B.C. and in Mary Callery's interpretation in 1942.

Obviously some of the resemblances are accidental and coincidental. However the museum was attempting to show how things that look weird and seem unprecedented have been done by artists since the beginning of civilization. Of course the motives were not always the same. But the museum felt the exhibit would show that modern artists are not tricksters trying to invent strange new kinds of expressions just to be different.

The museum examples are good illustrations, but they are not the only ones to be found. Other interesting comparisons can be made with primitive art, for many artists have studied

the work of these children of the earth, who had no schools or theories to influence them, so that their art is a rare example of pure art. They drew what they felt themselves, capturing the inner essence of the animals with which they lived by exaggerating the shoulders of a charging bison or elongating an animal in flight. They were limited in ability and understanding but this exaggeration to make one feel what the animal was doing has been done by many artists today. Compare the animal drawings of Franz Marc and examples of cave paintings in Spain. The similarity in feeling of both is remarkable as is the illustration of the prehistoric Venus and Lachaise's bronze statuette of 1918. This illustration was one I had to include, for such interest in the over abundance of feminine forms at such widely separated periods in history is amusing as well as remarkable.



Carrying these illustrations further than examples that merely resemble each other and comparing the philosophies of life and art from previous cultures with some of the philosophies of our modern artists will again show amazing similarities.

The comparison of the philosophy of Henri Matisse with the philosophy of life of the Persians, as well as comparing his decorative art with theirs, is important, for Matisse has admittedly been influenced by the decorative and arabesque qualities of Persian art. To quote Matisse, "What I dream of is an art pure and calm - free of disturbing subject matter - an art that can be for any intellectual worker, for the business man, or the writer, a means of soothing the soul. Something like a comfortable armchair, in which one can rest from physical fatigue".<sup>1</sup>

And the Persian philosophy of art is also one of pleasure for pleasure's sake, for luxurious living. They too liked to surround themselves with art, to enjoy it leisurely, asking nothing but stimulation and enjoyment.<sup>2</sup> Is it strange then, that not only the color and decoration of Matisse but the feeling of his art reminds one so strongly of Persian art.

The tremendous influence of the past on Picasso is obvious when we examine the periods his work has passed through. His amazing experiments have carried him through phases when

1) Romm, op. cit., p. 6

2) Arthur Upham Pope, Masterpieces of Persian Art, The Dryden Press, New York, 1945 pp. 2 - 3



he worked to capture the essence of African sculpture, of Classic Greek forms, of Byzantine decoration, and of Medieval stained glass. He has never been content to accept one philosophy, but searches and probes into every example of human creativeness he can find.

Kandinsky feels that art should be nothing more than an expression of the spirituality of man. The belief in the soul, so manifest in his art, is closely paralleled to the beliefs of the people of India. Their religion taught them that the soul is the only reality, and we can see this philosophy in Kandinsky's conviction that that is beautiful which springs from the soul. Art should be cleansed of material things and become an art of the soul and mystic experience.<sup>1</sup> Kandinsky, therefore, often does pure color abstractions using a form of color symbolism. The colors represent feelings and thoughts. Sometimes he suggests subject matter. The artists of India, who did primarily sculpture, also changed natural appearances and used many symbols, adding arms and legs, and distorting subject matter to develop their beliefs. Kandinsky's use of color is a modern expression, but his theories have been expressed very strongly in the past. Naturally his compositions live in his own mind, but isn't this true of so many things. How can we condemn such things when we know so little of the workings of the mind where the immaterial become material.

The elongation of the sculpture of Lehmbruck not only can

1) Cheney, The Story of Modern Art, op. cit., pp. 405, 409

be compared to a similar appearing Etruscan bronze, but his method of attaining spiritual elegance has a counterpart in El Greco of sixteenth century Spain, who elongated to create strong religious and emotional feeling.

The powerful lithographs, cartoons, and paintings of William Gropper, who is perhaps the most forceful commentator on national affairs today, have often been compared with the power of Daumier's paintings and cartoons in early nineteenth century France. Not only do they have a great deal in common in their ability to say something, but also in the way they say it, in their composition, form, plane arrangement, and mastery of design.

But what, you may say, of Dali and the surrealists. Where would you find a counterpart for that in the history of art? Back in fifteenth century Flanders there existed a painter named Hieronymus Bosch, who was more beset with devils than Dali. He found them not only in depicting hell, but in kitchen crockery, common garden tools, fish, owls, and sea-going eggshells. His mind constantly looked over the edge of fear, and his strange imaginings were more fantastic than those of the surrealists, who also search their dreams and imaginings. The other great Flemish master, Peter Brueghel, also used surrealistic motifs and themes to depict the legends and tales of his people. His engraving "The Downfall of the Magician" is an example.



The portrait busts of Jacob Epstein are an example of a whole school of twentieth century modernism which deals with psychological portraiture. This approach has been used by many artists in the past, even as far back as the Eighteenth Dynasty in Egypt, established in 1580 B.C., Cheney<sup>1</sup> in discussing the portrait heads of Ikhnaton and his queen, says, "The truth is more than surface realism. It is a revelation of inner character, and it gives away the man more certainly than the camera ever could....the subtle psychic revelation, the report on the man's soul." Speaking of portraiture in general under King Ikhnaton, he<sup>2</sup> said, "he encouraged sculp-

1) Cheney, A World History of Art, op. cit, p. 95

2) Ibid., p. 96



tors to cultivate absolute freedom of observation and portrayal". Our methods of introspection have greatly improved over the simple observing technique of the ancient Egyptians. The theory, however, has long been practiced. It requires a great deal more thought and tells a great deal more about the subject than does the work of the society artist who beautifies his homely dowager on canvas.

In the art of China we have one of the greatest cultural achievements of mankind. Some people consider the Chinese to be heathens, primitive and uncultured. However the mass of Chinese art is the greatest that has existed as a whole in the history of the world. Consider the great number of paintings and sculptures, the plastic understanding era after era, posterity's inheritance in pottery, porcelain, jewelry, textiles, costuming, metal work, jade, and lacquer.<sup>1</sup> Underlying all this work there is an abstract, thought-provoking philosophy. "They have examined realism and found it an inferior type of expression. They miss the accent of cosmic calm, the abstract signs of spiritual penetration, the serenity that comes after contemplation."<sup>2</sup>

They realized there is more to life than what can be seen on the surface. Compared to their art the realism of western art is shallow. The tendency today is to feel that we are so advanced, that we have reached a higher peak of culture. But do our fast trains, skyscrapers, radios, and other modern inventions give us greater peace of mind? Do we have more or

1) Ibid., p. 246

2) Ibid., p. 246

less neurotics than these patient, thoughtful people of one thousand years ago had?

The greatest decorative art of all times was developed by the Persians. For over sixty centuries they contributed ideas and techniques to the world. Their art was primarily a decorative art of symbolism. They developed a language of the emotions, using recognizable images of the objects and ideas vital to all, and arranged them in patterns to create the desired response. Through their art they attempted to communicate with the powers of Heaven, and to stir deep and intense feeling. The qualities of their art have gone far beyond representation.<sup>1</sup> Of course the abstract symbols were understood by the people. Father taught son and their art developed slowly over many centuries. Understanding came with time. This abstract form of expression in the hands of their masters had as great power to stir the people as great music always has had. Do you get that feeling from looking at a realistic, calendar-type rendering of today? An art which invokes pleasurable emotions does not have to have a message or something to see. If we can learn to approach modern art as we do music, relaxed, leisurely, asking nothing but stimulation and enjoyment, we can progress from our hurried way of life and learn to cultivate living as an art.

In Persia, the meaning of the symbols developed over centuries. Our modern art is very young. It is grasping after much that was felt strongly in the great art cultures of the past

1) Pope, op. cit., pp. 1 - 5

and became lost in the classic, realistic periods. It is trying to express that feeling in the ways of our own time. We must grow with it. Search out this art of the past. Relate your findings to modern examples. Compare the designs with which the Persians surrounded themselves to the designs we see on the borders of magazines or candy boxes today. Compare Chinese painting with the Saturday Evening Post type of illustration or with the realistic American artists who depict the American Scene. Then look at the work of the artists from the modern school. See which one stimulates thought, mood and feeling.

Even those strange drawings of Picasso which include several aspects of a face - a succession of points of view such as front, profile, and back, known to the mind but not seen by the eye simultaneously - were not original with Picasso. The anonymous Egyptian artist who was bound by system and convention for almost forty-five centuries attempted to say in his wall reliefs at the very beginning of painting what told most about his subject. The head and legs were drawn in profile while the eye, shoulders and chest were drawn in front view. This conventional way of working satisfied them for centuries. There are many other examples: the designs of the Northwest Indians, African Negro sculpture, and Chinese bronzes are a few of the possible ones.<sup>1</sup>

Further study will reveal that the really great geniuses of the past felt these expressive, creative qualities: Giotto

1) Helen Gardner, Art Through the Ages, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, Revised, 1948, p. 734

felt them with his search for humanism; Michelangelo felt them with his twisting and distorting of the human form; Rembrandt felt them with his plastic manipulation of light and dark; Turner felt them in his open, misty, suggestive landscapes that remind one of the spiritual penetration of the Chinese. These and many more artists of the past felt the underlying principles of modern art, for the principles remain constant. The artist, in the intangible process of creation, uses certain forms, colors, lines and rhythms to express different emotions and ideas. Artists have used common ways of doing this through the ages. Modern art is not just a sensational new development in art that will soon pass, but is a way of thinking and feeling that men have known from time immemorial.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SCHOOLS OF MODERN ART

[The modern movement has taken many different forms of expression, and its philosophies are being interpreted in many different ways. Some artists,] such as Klee or Modigliani, [are greatly individualistic and their theories are difficult to classify into an existing group. Others can more easily be gathered into schools, such as the cubist, futurist, or Mexican schools of art. The majority of artists loathe being linked with a school because every artist feels he is an individual creator,] but by grouping common aims or principles into separate schools, it will make the understanding easier. I will mention theories of the school rather than dwelling too long on particular artists within the school. In our contemporary world the ease of travel and communication puts all artists in touch with the thinking and theories of every group. Therefore some experiment within one group and go on to other experiments, as do Picasso, Derain, or Weber. Other artists such as Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne, or Braque worked predominantly within one philosophy.

[The art of the western world has always been primarily realistic. It deals with things that one can easily recognize and that one can understand with a minimum of effort.] With few exceptions this feeling has prevailed since early Greek art. This classic realism was revived and installed as a ruthless law by the art dictator of France, David, and his

neo-classic artists, after the French revolution. It culminated in the ultra-realistic, amazing craftsmanship of Ingres and his followers, where drawing meant everything.

This movement was followed by the romanticists who felt the cold, sterile, Greek way of working was not true to the feeling of the French people. They used warmer colors and movement in their canvases. They were individualistic and tried to put human feeling into their art, but still painted literally. The classicists had forced nature to stand still, painting each little piece accurately. The romanticists forced nature to pass before the eye, weaving everything into a sense of movement.

[The realistic movement developed where the artists attempted not to move nature before the eye, nor to pass the eye over nature picking out every detail, but rather to paint as one actually sees. The center of interest in the line of direct vision would be drawn clearly, the rest blurred and suggested.

The newly discovered camera proved them all wrong, and the new scientific discoveries that color was refracted light, led to the impressionists. Impressionism was the final fulfillment of the scientific and realistic aims of painting.<sup>1</sup> The activity which we call modern art is the art of the past seventy-five years which stems from this impressionist movement in France. } The majority of impressionist artists were links. Some, as Degas, were trained in the classic tradition and developed into impressionists. Others, like Renoir, started as

1) Cheney, A World History of Art, op. cit., p. 798

impressionists and absorbed the post-impressionistic theories of Cezanne.<sup>1</sup>

[The impressionists attempted to depict the light that bathed an object rather than drawing sharp objects in space. They tried to capture a single moment of time when light was constant, a certain pose, a definite gesture, instead of the timeless permanence of a classic pose. They used everyday subject matter and were primarily interested in how light shows up an object.<sup>2</sup> Scientists showed them that color was more alive, more brilliant, if tiny dots or smears were placed side by side and the mixing left to the eye. They suppressed drawing for this study into light and color.] These theories lay behind the work of Monet, Degas, Renoir, Pissarro, and Sisley. [Any gallery will show how alive and brilliant their painting became, as compared with the muddy browns and grays of previous painting.]

1) Wilenski, op. cit., p. 37

2) T.W.Earp, The Modern Movement in Painting, The Studio Publications, New York, 1935, p. 11







Out of this movement grew the post-impressionists who branched off into many different directions. The most important was the form seeking school, led by Paul Cezanne who is considered the father of modern art if so complex a movement can have one father. He spent his life searching for the elements of rhythm, order, and plastic vitality that he felt painting should have and that the impressionists had lost. A painting should have "a life of its own" and not be a momentary gesture or a fleeting second of time. Abstract design and formal excellence, which are indispensable in the creative element of a painting, should underlie the subject matter. The individual value of a human figure, a tree, or an apple was not important. Their importance lay only in the color and form they contributed to the whole. Cezanne felt the planes receding in space were more important than the atmosphere of light sought by the impressionists. He reduced nature to its simplest forms. He wanted to make of impressionism something solid and permanent like the work of the old masters, but gradually arrived at a new conception basic to all twentieth century art. Although his theories were evident in the work of Giotto, Brueghel, El Greco, Rembrandt, and a few others from the past, they were never revealed so openly as a pure art by these masters, but always related to religious or subjective reality. Cezanne felt the form, life, and architecture of the painting were more important than the subject matter.<sup>1</sup>

1) Cheney, A World History of Art, op. cit., pp. 864 - 868



[Cezanne felt nature's forms were not art forms. Objects in life were not flat. They had volume and therefore many different outlines. The impressionists, the realists, the camera, the use of perspective, all saw something from a given angle, catching only one image. How can the whole object or the changing quality of form be shown? Cezanne painted objects from one side, then from another, then from the middle, and superimposed the outlines upon each other while eliminating detail.] It takes many days to develop this style on canvas, so his subjects were mainly still lifes or landscapes, subjects

that did not move. However his outlines seemed to move. So too, do outlines change as people move. This development, although a form of distortion, is truer to life than photography, and brought a new dimension to painting which was more revolutionary than perspective.<sup>1</sup>

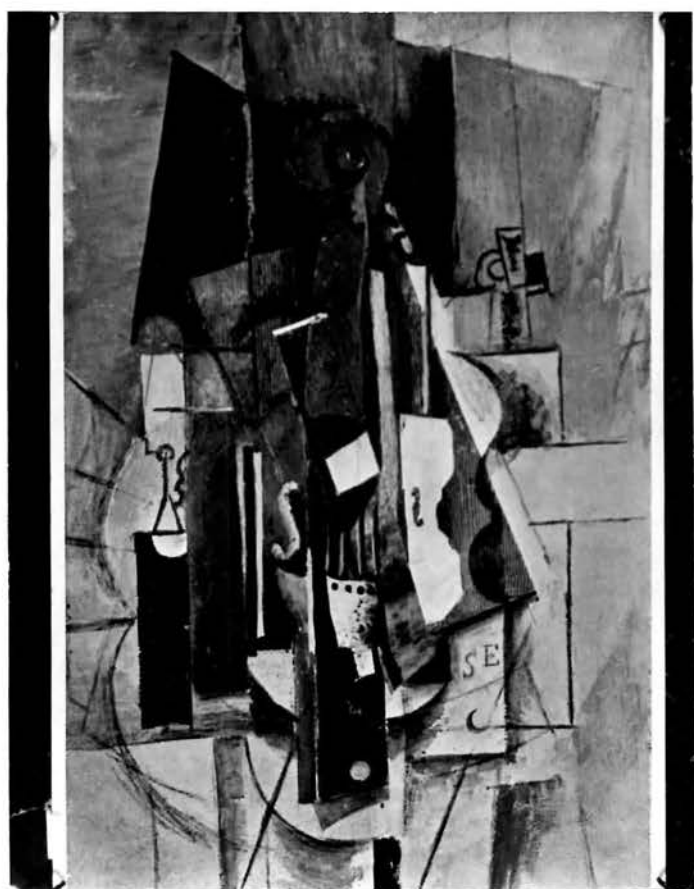
Another great link from the impressionists to modern art was Georges Seurat who developed the pointillist technique. He took the broken color theories of the impressionists and built up areas with tiny, roundish dots of color of about equal size, working out the color relation of dot to dot. However, underlying his exhaustive application of the color theory which he expressed on canvas was an abstract rhythm and design. He was worshipped by the cubist school that followed for his mastery of composition and his arrangement of areas.<sup>2</sup>

The cubist school, through its originator Picasso and its classic adherent Braque, developed Cezanne's philosophy that nature should be reduced to its simplest fundamental forms: a cube, a cone, and a cylinder. After analyzing the essential and characteristic shapes of his objects, the artist takes apart the natural arrangement of these objects and rearranges them according to his own understanding of the laws of color, form, and design. This refers again to the belief that nature's forms are not art forms. By unearthing the beauty of the simple basic forms and by working out a much more harmonious relationship of these forms, the artist can create far greater design

1) Mack, op. cit., pp. 304 - 320, 371 - 384

2) Earp, op. cit., p. 16

than exists in nature. By repeating design forms over again he can approach the lyric qualities of music and poetry. Sometimes the artist's essential shape is close enough to allow you to recognize the object. Other times, the overlapping, cut-up appearance of the objects does not suggest the artist's inspiration, for the cubists believe strongly that picture building does not have to depend on subject matter. When subject matter is used it is not used as subject matter in itself, but as a tool for composition. The cubists demolished the theory that art is imitation, and were an important step along the road of modern art.



Braque felt that texture and touch were as important to painting as sight, so he introduced sand, bits of wood, paper, glass, metal or string into his paintings. This upset most laymen very much, but to the artists it developed into a fascinating way to enrich a canvas. Today cross-hatching, graininess, smoothness, and other textural effects are an integral part of painting. The cubists have pointed out how, if we persist in judging pictures by their likeness to a given convention of nature, we miss the significance of such great art as that of the Orient and Africa, and of the many geniuses throughout art history. As the philosopher Kant pointed out, we never know a thing-by-itself, but only the thing as affected by time and space. So in a cubist picture when objects appear and disappear as images do in moving before the mind, a sharp outline succeeded by a dissipation of forms, the painter is setting down a record of experience.<sup>1</sup> Granting that all this is the intention of the artist, you may wonder how any uninitiated mortal can be expected to know it, when admittedly in some of these works all likeness to recognizable objects has disappeared. Well, consider classics in great museums. How much do "subjects" interest us? Do we "recognize" any? Or do we judge the paintings on the handling of color, form, space, texture, harmony, and the laws of painting?<sup>2</sup>

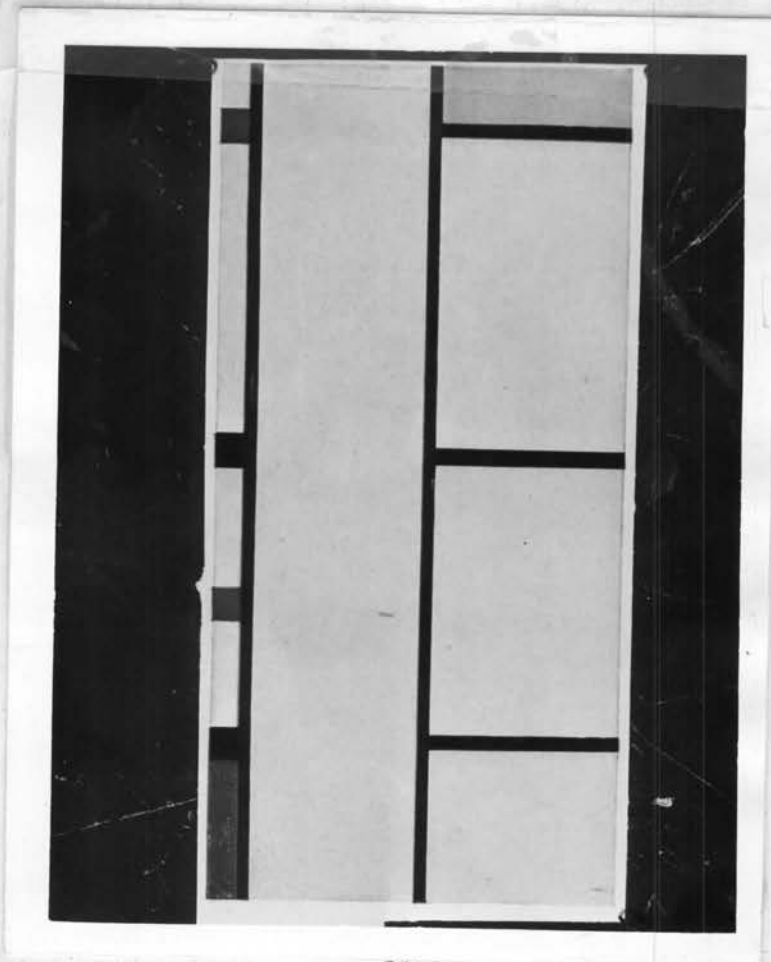
In Holland, in the twenties, the late Piet Mondrian carried the cubist theories much further into completely non-objective, scientific experiments in geometric abstractions. The

1) Pach, op. cit., p. 79

2) Ibid., p. 83 - 84



purists, as he and his followers became known, completely eliminated any semblance of nature from their work, arranging rectangular areas into perfect adjustment. Some of the rectangles are white, some are bright red, yellow or blue, and usually separated with a heavy black line. Rectangles are used because the purists felt they are the basic element, as all curves in nature can be broken down into component units of straight lines. The primary colors are usually used because they are the basis of all colors. Therefore, Mondrian and his followers of pure, non-objective, "T-Square" artists, feel they are working with forms and colors that are the basis of nature and of art.



Another large branch of modern art is the emotional school, wherein the artist portrays his own feelings and emotions in expressing the object. Their aim is to reveal the artist's imaginings and his own way of seeing. The pouring out of Van Gogh's soul into his distorted, expressive, blazing paintings are an example. He captures a powerful mood expressing the feeling of growth and life, of torment and unrest.

This emotional group is characterized by the fauves or "wild men" of early twentieth century France, who today are the backbone of modern French art. They were not closely linked in manifestations but rather were grouped because of the similarity of their ideas. Detail was ruthlessly handled. The established standard of the beautiful subject was abolished. The important thing was not what was painted but the painting itself. They felt they were a movement of liberation to create beauty rather than to copy it. They experimented a great deal and painted anything and everything and used unexpected angles. Gauguin was their god at first because they admired huge canvases and murals. These young artists were filled with unrest and sought pure painting and freedom in creation rather than the limiting theories of color and light of the impressionists. Raoul Dufy, Georges Rouault, and Henri Matisse are a few who developed from this group.<sup>1</sup>

The German expressionists were closely akin in spirit to the Fauves. Although expressionism could be applied to most of the art of this period, it was in Germany that the name was

1) Earp, op. cit., p. 21 - 24



adopted and that the current ran strongest until Hitler. Under the influence and teaching of Kandinsky, Klee, Feininger, and Marc, and with the encouragement of the German official galleries, prewar Germany found no conservative painter. Oskar Kokaschka, Schmidt Rottluff, Emil Nolde, Carl Hofer, Ernst Ludwig, Georg Grosz, and Jawlensky were all wading through nature in a ruthless search for form. The intensity of their search caused them to ride roughshod over nature for structural feeling, compactness, and force of emotion. Not nature but the laws of the picture plane and the search for form and color led them on. They combined Cezanne's theories of form, Matisse's theories of color, and the expressionism of the Norwegian Munch into their work. This movement spread into literature, music, architecture, and the theatre. When the Nazis wiped out the Bauhaus school, which had this movement as its nucleus, these expressionists fled to all parts of the world.<sup>1</sup>

The third big branch of the post-impressionistic impulse was the decorative type of painting. This group, receiving its main stimulation from the work of Paul Gauguin, went after rich color and the melodious and rhythmic interpretation of subject matter. They distorted for mural flatness and used nature for decorative means.<sup>2</sup> It was a more solid type of painting than impressionism, but did not approach the complexity of Cezanne's intellectual form theories. By stressing the importance of decoration, of the surface in painting, and of pure and intense colors, Gauguin and his followers contributed to the trend

1) Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art, op. cit., pp. 199 - 204

2) Cheney, A World History of Art, op. cit., pp. 862 - 863

toward abstract art.<sup>1</sup> Gauguin's simplification of forms for intense expression led to a method often employed by the expressionists. He expanded the concept of art and opened the way to the understanding of the less civilized arts.<sup>2</sup>

Like Gauguin, who was a friend of the symbolist poets, and aspired to be a symbolist painter,<sup>3</sup> many of the decorative artists utilized symbolism. Symbolism has always played an important part in art, and since every artist works with a form of symbolism, it is difficult to call it a school. The colors chosen, or the subjects painted are symbols. It can be the pure abstraction of a sign, such as the cross or swastika, or it can be a recognizable object such as a Madonna or a realistic Greek sculpture like "The Discus Thrower". A symbol is an object or an image that is intended by the artist to represent a whole field of reality. So the Mona Lisa can stand for all womanhood and their intangible nature, as directly created by Leonardo Da Vinci, or a symbol can grow out of the society and times and take on meaning for most people, such as the hammer and sickle or santa claus symbols. The trouble with modern symbols is that our age of individual expression causes the symbols of most artists to become increasingly private. The Persians who perhaps made more use of symbolism in art than any other culture, abstracted their symbols to the level of understanding of the people. However, and perhaps this is the crux of the whole matter of symbols, we today greatly admire Persian designs,

1) Fiske Kimball and Lionello Venturi, Great Paintings in America, Coward-McCann, Inc., New York, p. 202

2) Ibid., p. 202

3) Ibid., p. 202

and they are being used as a basis for a whole design development in fashion and fabric designs, yet the meaning of the symbols is unintelligible to us.

Today the artists must invent their own symbols and draw the subjects of their art from their own experience, because they are no longer supported by a generally understood mythology.<sup>1</sup> Even the symbols used by religious cults in their paintings are no longer understood by the majority of the members of that cult. Look at religious paintings and ask yourself why certain figures are used. Who are they? What does their action symbolize? What do the birds and animals in the painting mean?

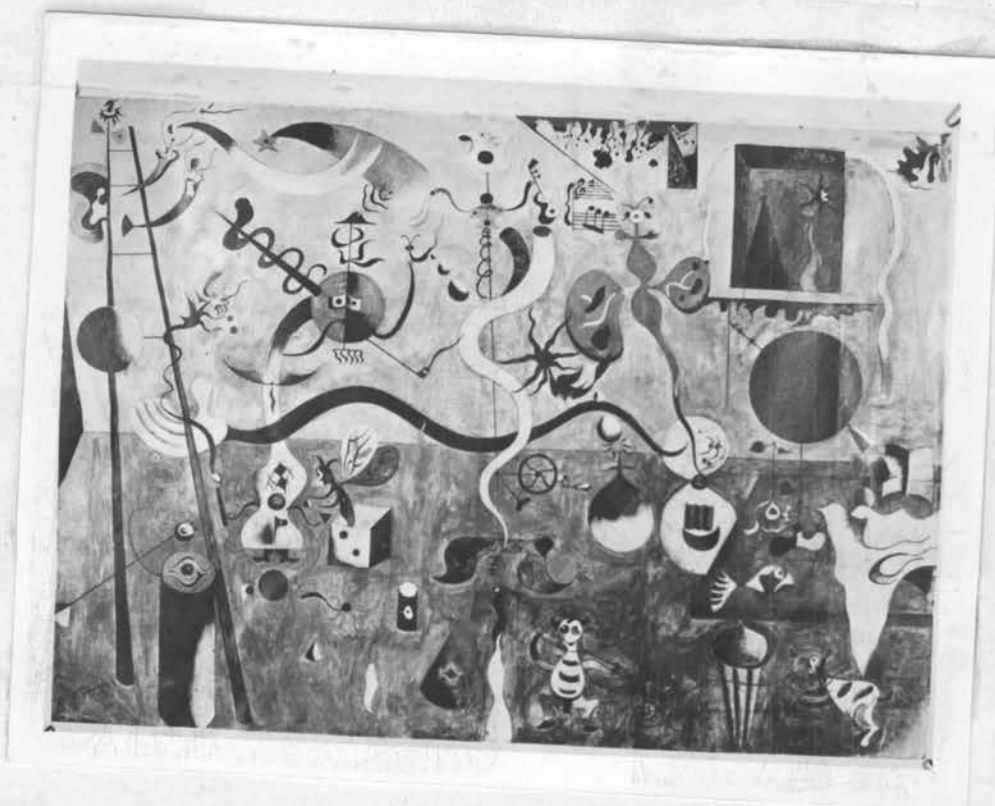
Therefore symbolists have gone into suggestive painting, for the clearer their images become, the more they lose in poetic suggestion. When the surrealists became meticulously accurate in their rendering, their symbols lost their suggestive qualities.<sup>2</sup> Many of the artists, therefore, do not use definite symbols but rather suggestions calculated to stir your imagination and to start inner reminiscences suggested by the image, but not limited to the feeling about a specific object. The words of M. Allarme<sup>3</sup>, "to evoke...to suggest...that is what charms the imagination.", used in connection with the symbolist poets of the 1880's, might well apply to the art of Chagall, Matisse, Miro, Chirico, Klee, Beckmann, Picasso, and the other symbolists. Miro is one of the cleverest of the group, and by studying his paintings you can discover all sorts of witty

1) Robert Goldwater, "Symbolism in Painting", Art News, September, 1947, Volume XLVI, Number 7, pp. 14 - 16

2) Ibid., p. 44

3) Ibid., p. 15

little symbols: staring and concentric eyes stand for inquisitive people, a palette indicates the artist, wavy furrows a tilled field. The symbols are tied together with wavy lines, or by clever arrangements of forms and the balance of color.



All of these foregoing theories, and the appreciation of instinctive statements and pure art, led to a reawakened interest in primitive art, negro art, and the other uninfluenced expressions. Into this classification of primitive art falls a certain type of modern art. Some artists are "naturals", who, though naive and with little schooling, have an intuitive understanding of design and the feeling for painting. The charm of their work is in the absence of technical trickery and in the clear pattern they sense. The greatest of these "primitives"



is Henri Rousseau, the French customs inspector who became a "Sunday" painter. Many primitives arose in early America where the broad expanses of this young country were remote from schools. Their influence has not been great but they are a delightful contrast to the involved intellectualism of other schools.

The futurists were a group in Italy who were disgusted that Italy was but a museum to the world of art. They wanted a part in the present scene and tried to adapt cubism to life using the machine as a basis for design. Their work was quickly accepted by advertising groups and became a strong expression in the commercial art field.<sup>1</sup>

It is the surrealists, I fear, who have done a great deal of harm to the modern movement. They are only an offshoot of the large movement, and yet the average layman considers them to be the typical example of modern art. It is about them that most questions are asked. [Why is a melted watch covered with ants? Why has a nude woman drawers for breasts? Well, some moderns can become corny and novel.] They are contemporary but not modern. They utilize the old, precise, academic drawing technique in their paintings. They graft Freudian subject matter onto the old story telling picture idea and render it as the old academicians did. The shock is in the subject matter rather than the method. Modern abstract art involves getting away from the dominance of subject matter. The exaggerated draftsmanship and the exact rendering of dreams and psychological

1) Earp, op. cit., pp. 35 - 36

cal imaginings becomes, therefore, a reactionary force within the modern movement. Some of the better surrealists have managed to communicate strange and intense moods. They have captured the sense of individual loneliness and the terrifying aspects of a bewildering world.

There are many artists, typified by John Marin, who recognize and accept the abstract principles and theories underlying modern art, and use them as a way to reveal their feelings about nature. They rearrange the forms for expressive emphasis, and try to capture the essential feeling of their subject, ending up with a very individual way of working. It is abstract in arrangement and analysis, yet realistic in that the subject matter inspiring the idea is never completely lost. It is a very vigorous way of working and a healthy "down the middle" course.



One of the greatest groups painting in the world today is the Mexican group. This, more than any other, is a single, national school, and their racial expression is unmistakable. They have served the cause of international modernism by proving the lessons of form, organization, and the abstract principles of art are a language that artists can utilize in expressing the feeling of their own territory. Men of the calibre of Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, thoroughly versed in the theories and language of modern art, are using that language to tell the story of their own land, and to fight for their social and political beliefs. They are unquestionably the world's greatest mural painters.<sup>1</sup>

In a class by himself among modern artists is the fabulous Pablo Picasso. He is by far the most controversial and the most influential of the moderns. His output is prodigious and through his shifts in subject matter and approach that never cease, he has started and influenced more schools and ways of working than any other contemporary artist. From his early green, blue, and rose periods, through experiments with African sculpture sources, into cubism, abstraction, Byzantine, classic periods, and then into figures with seemingly scrambled profiles he has gone his restless, inquisitive way. His work varies from reflecting the approach of primitive man to the time-space theories of Einstein. His links are in the past as well as the present. He experimented with all historical ways

1) Cheney, The Story of Modern Art, op. cit., pp. 549 - 560



of handling space. Yet curiously enough, it is hard to find any other artist of the early twentieth century who was so completely the expression of his age. The changes of the world at this period found immediate birth in Picasso's art.<sup>1</sup> He is constantly experimenting with ideas but announces no theories. Although men put theories into his mouth, he only pours out what he feels.<sup>2</sup>

Barr<sup>3</sup> gives some of his ideas. Picasso feels research in connection with modern art means nothing. The important thing is to find. One who seeks out but does not find arouses no one's interest. When he paints, his object is to show what he has found and not what he is looking for. Picasso never created nor did he pretend to create "Picassoism". He loathes "schools". His natural inclination makes him insist on creating something. His plan must be fulfilled in harmony with his idea of what is true and must be in accord with the rhythm of the passing moment.

He is always changing his approach because he feels the artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from all possible sources. They may come from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a spider's web. That is why he feels we must not discriminate between the sources of inspiration. Where things are concerned there are no class distinctions. We must pick out what is good for us where we can find it, except from our own works. Picasso has a horror of copying himself.<sup>4</sup> He

1) World's Masters Series, Pablo Picasso, The Studio, L.T.D., London, 1939, p. 4

2) Ibid., p. 2

3) Barr, Picasso, Forty Years of His Art, op. cit., p. 9

4) Ibid., p. 59

sought to create pure form, to make images that by the clearness of their structure would convey the idea of life and reality. He discarded all resemblance to natural forms and sought to create a pure abstract language of form. The majority of laymen do not understand his art, and therefore cannot appreciate it. Picasso realizes this, but as he said to Barr,<sup>1</sup> "I do not read English, and an English book is a blank to me. This does not mean that the English language does not exist, and why should I blame anybody else but myself if I cannot understand what I know nothing about?"

There are many other individuals today who do not work in the theories of any one school. They themselves experiment, combine theories, interpret theories, and on the whole give to art a quality which compared to the past is dynamic. Modern art is going through a number of phases. Nobody can sum them all up. Science, philosophy, psychology, propaganda, art techniques, emotions, reflection, individualism all are to be found in modern art. All are reflecting the free man and the inquisitive mind developed by our culture pattern. A thousand years hence this art will mirror the thinking and discoveries of the twentieth century just as surely as a Gothic cathedral or a Leonardo Da Vinci painting reflected their age. The complexities of modern art reflect the complexities of our age. Its numerous manifestations allow for choice and discrimination, just as we choose and discriminate in every field of human endeavor.

1) Ibid., p. 12

CHAPTER VIII  
LET'S LOOK AT SOME PAINTINGS

I. Botticelli, "Birth of Venus"



The first painting I have chosen for a detailed discussion was done in the fifteenth century by an Italian renaissance master. What, you may ask, has Botticelli to do with modern art? He has a great relationship to modern art because the understanding and appreciation of a great classic masterpiece requires just as much effort as the understanding of modern art. Botticelli utilizes just as many abstract symbols and thought-provoking philosophies as do the modern masters. Although his theme reflects the great interest of his period in Greek mythology, he has interpreted the theme

through his own understanding of life and the technique of painting. The true appreciation of Botticelli's painting, just as any great masterpiece whether it be classic or modern, can not be had casually.

Let us consider first the physical side of Botticelli's painting. The initial attraction is strong because of the actual gold leaf used in the hair of Venus. Variety created by the contrast of the light values of Venus and the shell against the darker areas enhances that attraction. The movement and agitation of the other figures compared to the stationary, quiet attitude of Venus, and the fact that Venus is unified in color and value and is the most interesting figure, gives dominance to the main motif. Red and green are the basic colors which is a primitive complimentary technique. The second pair of colors, blue and gold, are also compliments. Botticelli achieves order by balancing the compliments. These are the physical things we see, but what do they mean? What do they represent? There is a lady on a sea shell, sea, sky, figures, roses in the water. Why is it a great masterpiece? These images of objects we have seen are merely suggested by Botticelli. Their meaning lies far beneath the surface representation. They are only suggestions because Venus apparently has no weight. She is standing on the edge of a sea shell which would spank her in real life. Actually she couldn't stand leaning to one side in such a manner. Anatomically the figures on the left are impossible. This distortion is not the result of the inability of Botticelli to draw, but because he wanted it

clear that he was not talking about things of the physical world. His promontories look more like dolphins than real points of land. The trees are rigid, stiff, and not like the trees we see in nature. The meaning of these objects and the reasons that Botticelli interpreted them in this manner validates the genius of Botticelli and the greatness of the painting.

The straight lines of the trees and horizon were used very definitely to enhance the agitation and restlessness of the large figure on the right. The dolphin-like promontories were used because the dolphin is the art symbol of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty. A renaissance misconception made the Roman Venus the goddess of love. The figures on the left represent the southwest wind. The south wind, soft and gentle, is depicted as feminine. The west wind, hard and strong, is masculine. They are blowing her toward the isle because the myth goes that she was born of the foam of the sea, wafted on the the isle of Cythera, received by nymphs, and called the Cytherian Goddess.

Botticelli, as a philosopher, emphasized the non-physical aspects, because he was a student of Plato's philosophy that the essential reality is not physical, although most people think of the Goddess of Love as physical. The immaterial, not the material, counts. Botticelli is not expressing facts of a physical world. His ideal of womanhood and love is sad, wistful, melancholy, lovely, which is so true of life and love, for their cost is great and they come with much pain. The Christian



belief of the importance of the spiritual rather than physical things and of the sadness of life is embodied here. Despite interpreting a Greek myth, he does not reflect the lusty attitude the Greeks had toward life. Only when the philosophy and symbolism behind this masterpiece are understood, can the sensitive and magnificent interpretation be appreciated. This holds true of all great works of art from any school or from any period.

## II. Picasso, "Guernica Mural"



The second painting to be considered is one of the most discussed and controversial paintings of the whole modern movement. In 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, a small, quiet, ancient, holy Basque town, full of refugees, became

the target for the first "total" air-raid, and it was wiped out in three and a half hours. Two days later Picasso started a mural that was to become the greatest of anti-Fascist works of art. Picasso used only white, black, and gray, in tune with the grim horror of the destruction of this town. The dead have no color. Also appropriately for the stark subject matter, he composed with largely angular, thematic material, areas with sharp darting angles, and so related them in violent oppositions of line, value, and shape that the panel presents the paradoxical effect of orderly confusion.<sup>1</sup>

The mural is a combination of cubist and expressionist-surrealist illustration. It is not a picture-copy-imitation of a real scene you might see, or a simple poster or banal political cartoon which you can easily understand and forget in a few minutes. It is a design that diagrams our whole present dark age. It is a painting of pain and suffering. It symbolizes human destruction, cruelty and waste throughout the world. It challenges all of our basic ways of living, thinking and looking.

The design is set in a self-limited stage world, an interior-exterior, an inside room and an outside town square simultaneously. The mural is an allegory. Its symbolic meanings are what overpower ones own concepts.

The bristling bull symbolizes the brute stupidity of Franco-Fascism. It is in a moment of pause, retreating, preparing for another attack. It has a defiant, erect tail, alert sharp ears, and strange staring eyes that look without seeing for it is

1) Gardner, op. cit., p. 735



a creature without mind or human heart. Under the bull an anguished mother raises a fierce cry to the skies. She has a pointed paralyzed tongue and eyes and nostrils that have become teardrops. She holds a lifeless child that is limp as a rag-doll with her lips sealed in innocence.

In the lower left corner lies a helpless, clumsy hand with chopped off, scattered, divided fingers that are stuck out like sore thumbs in all directions. Its palm is crossed with fatal life lines. Next to the hand is a decapitated man. This bust of a smashed statue symbolizes the young Republic. It has eyes that cannot see straight and roll in reflex action. We look down into a hollow, open mouth that utters no sound. We look up under a nose for we have a circulating viewpoint. A cold iron horseshoe, the symbol of good luck, is turned, as if seen from below, to warn and threaten us, the onlookers.

In the center at the bottom lies a dismembered, mutilated arm. Its clenched fist with its frozen grip of death on a broken sword is a hopeless defense gesture against a surprise attack. The young flower blossom signifies the renewal of life and hope like Eluard's "the last bud of the future".

To the right of center a dazed, fascinated woman is lunging and looking up. Her nipples are bolted on her breasts imprisoning maternity, and she has futile appealing hands and painfully drags her torn broken feet. Above her is a flaming building with an open window, a half open door, and a falling, shrieking woman on fire. To her left, directly above the dazed woman, is a face with a classic profile, aghast at the scene.

Her flying thrust out of a window is like a fusion of fast photographic images. She has a terrified hold on her breasts. Alongside of her an oil lamp, representing truth, lights the tragedy.

In the top center, a dying, disemboweled horse, on one knee, symbolizes Spain. He has been stabbed in the back from above, and his rigid tongue, raging throat, and twisted body symbolize horror and agony. The newspaper texture that covers him is a cubist pasted paper technique symbolizing headlines. And above it all shines the sun, the source of life like a radiant eye in the dark night. Within it an electric artificial light bulb, man's fateful discovery, completes the all-seeing God's eye that has witnessed the scene.<sup>1</sup>

After studying and analyzing this great condemnation on an act of man towards his fellow man, perhaps you will begin to see why some critics consider this the most important contribution to the art of the twentieth century. You may say it is not pretty, it is not pleasant, it isn't the type of painting you would want to live with. Was the scene pretty? Is it the type of act of man that we want to live with? Yet should it be forgotten? This mural will forever more shame this act of the Fascists and Nazis. How quickly most of us have forgotten the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps. How quickly we pass over photographs showing thousands of victims in order to reach the sports page. When one understands this mural he does not pass over it so quickly. Of course it is not pretty, but

1) Ad Reinhardt, "How to Look at the Picasso 'Guernica' Mural", Article, New York Sunday P.M., December 15, 1947

as Picasso said, "No, (this) painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war...against brutality and darkness".

III. Picasso, "Girl Before a Mirror"



I have decided upon a detailed analysis of another Picasso painting because a great deal of the confusion about modern art exists due to the mass of work turned out by artists of inferior talent. As in every period, of the thousands of paintings done, the bad vastly exceeds the good. Many artists bypass the mastering of drawing and the learning of the tools of

their trade to become abstractionists. The giants of modernism are master draftsmen and master technicians. They abstract to create. Picasso is the master creator.

The following exposition of this painting was given by M. Shapiro, professor of fine arts, Columbia University, to the Life roundtable discussion group on modern art.<sup>1</sup>

"This painting is a good choice for discussion because it is accepted as a great modern classic. Second, it is not an extreme example of "modernism" because the layman can still recognize most of the forms that the artist has distorted. And third, it has all the points that confuse the layman, such as the dislocated breasts or the out of place arm.

"To appreciate this and other modern pictures one must approach them with a fluid and sensitive imagination.

"Our knowledge of the human body is not only anatomical. There is an image of the body full of distortions and strange relationships. A toothache makes one side of your face feel bigger. Our so-called "body image" changes. So in fantasy our conception of the bodies of others is affected by our own feelings and desires.

"Picasso is portraying a personal, internal image of a girl in a state of highly sensual or sexual tension. An adolescent looking at herself in a mirror, feeling her awakening impulses. Picasso is attempting to portray these as they seem from the inside. He proceeds from his intense feeling for the girl, endowing her with a corresponding vitality. He paints

1) "A Life Round Table on Modern Art", Life Magazine, October 11, 1948, Volume 25, Number 15, p. 59

the body contemplated, loved, and self-contemplating. The vision of another's body becomes an intensely rousing and mysterious process. Picasso and other moderns have discovered for art the internationality of the body.

"Thus, the body is represented both from outside and within, and in the mirror is still another image of the body. I think that is a wonderful, magical, poetic idea, to show the human body which is ordinarily represented in one way, in its familiar surface form, as belonging to three different modes of experience, within one picture. I don't know of another painting in all history which does that.

"The woman outside the mirror is unbounded and her arm extends into the mirror image. The mirror is strongly enclosed but by orange and black, two colors which pull apart with an enormous tension. The face is lavender, and where normally there would be a shadow there is a brilliant yellow. This is an inversion of the expected relation of the overt and the hidden. The exposed profile is cool and pale and what is hidden and imagined, the unseen face, is an intense yellow, like a sun - a surprising and poetic idea. In the mirror the reflected lavender becomes richer and warmer. The vermillion and orange seem to grow out of it.

"The shapes too are forcefully contrasted and tied together. The repeated form of the breasts and of what we may take to be the womb, and the form at the elbow - the green circle - are all clearly related. The roundness of the face belongs with these circles. But in the face is also a moon

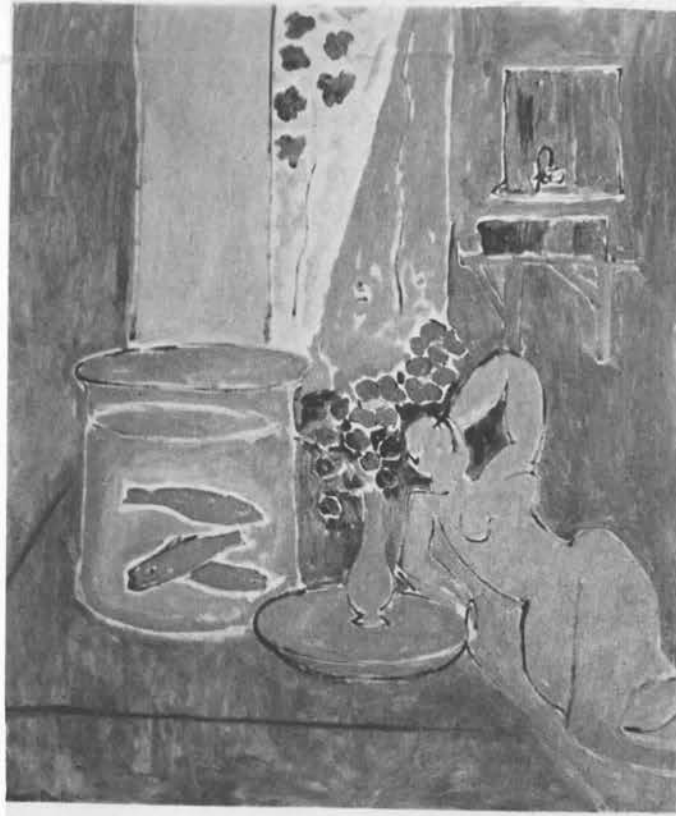
crescent which occurs elsewhere on the body and there is a large contrast like that of the sun and the moon in the relation of the real body and the mirrored body and indeed the moon has a reflected light. Whether the symbolism is deliberate, unconscious, or accidental, I would not dare to say; it is at least a metaphor emerging for me.

"All these colors and shapes are powerfully stimulating to me. They are sustained and intensified by the background. In the body the main parts are distinctly rounded, while the background, like a stained glass window, is made up of lozenges of brilliant color, each with a tiny circle. These contrasts and repetitions, so luxurious yet simple and clear, have a manifest purposiveness which to me is grand."

The question arises as to whether Picasso really intended all these things. That is unanswerable but any intelligent layman can confirm these points by looking at the picture once Dr. Shapiro has pointed them out. This is the way of all deep and great art. Some may get different responses. Do we all feel the same emotion from music? Do we not have conflicting evaluations of all created things? Emotions take form for us within our own limit of experience.



#### IV. Matisse, "Goldfish and Sculpture"



MATISSE: GOLDFISH AND SCULPTURE

The above painting by Matisse is another acknowledged classic of modern art. Henri Matisse painted it in 1911 at a time when the expressionistic fauves and the cubists were replacing impressionism as the dominant art theory. "Goldfish and Sculpture" shows the influence of both impressionism and the formal organization ideas of Paul Cezanne. These influences are to be discerned in the intricate balance of colors and in the arrangement of the solid objects: curtain, nude, fishbowl, vase, etc.,



which pulls the observer's eye toward the center of the canvas and give a feeling of depth to the surrounding space. These objects have been divested of all their qualities of photographic realism in order to heighten the formal and linear character that gives them meaning in relation to the composition of the picture as a whole. It has been fundamentally a problem of space, of position, of objects and bodies in space, and has been enormously influential on the whole subsequent generation of modern artists who, like Matisse, are apt to consider the subject matter of their paintings purely as elements in a pictorial organization.

The above explanation of "Goldfish and Sculpture" was presented to the Life round table by Georges Duthuit, editor of Transition Forty-Eight, Paris, France.<sup>1</sup>

V. Rouault, "Three Judges"



1) Ibid., p. 61

This painting is a classic of the expressionist school of modern art where passion is more important than techniques of painting or philosophies of composition and organization. Rouault expresses an artist's response to human beings and to society. It shows, through powerful satire, his horror of the modern world and a brutal disgust with human injustice. It makes one think of Dreyfus, Sacco and Vanzetti, and other harsh indictments of human society. However the thing that makes this painting great is the harmonization of this social content with the formal qualities of the composition. The pattern of the forms and the color are unified with the moral.

Aldous Huxley, author, and Raymond Mortimer, British critic, discussed this painting at the Life round table.<sup>1</sup>

The colors in themselves are extremely lovely. The judges are in a dulled red-orange and the background is a silvery grayed blue. The heavy black outline creates a feeling of stained glass and the colors become jewels, gleaming out of the darkness. They have a depth and rich hue that sparkles. The brutal shapes showing us the savageness of human character represent to me Rouault's sensitive plea for justice and the finer things of life by contrasting them to what life so frequently becomes.

The analysis and discussion of these five paintings are but an introduction to the vast possibilities of art, past and present. I hope they will stimulate you to look further. Time has sifted the masters out of the past and the vast hordes of minor artists have been forgotten. You must learn to look for the mas-

ters of modern art. A great deal of modern art is produced by artists of feeble talents. A great many do not have firm convictions and so turn out merely decorative work. A great many do not have the ability so turn out amateurish "primitive" work. A great many are exploring and experimenting, and as in any field, a large percentage of the experiments will fail. Do not judge a whole modern movement by your first look at "White on White".

The determination of what is good or bad is very difficult. Critics who advocate modernism violently disagree. Remember, however, that Rembrandt, Whistler, Van Gogh, Ryder, and many other brilliant artists from the past, whose work is sought out and honored today, were the objects of violent criticism, abuse, ridicule, and slander during their own life time. It appears that an advancing art is always in advance of its audience.

Learn to investigate for yourself the principles upon which great art is judged. Go with unbiased eyes and evaluate how successful a painting is in relation to the mood it creates. Look for the satisfaction it gives in color, form, design, space and line. Don't look for something to see only with your eyes but instead something that will cause you to think and feel. Look for attraction and stimulation through the energy, strength and variety of the colors used by the artist. Look for the order which will exist in any great painting, modern or classic. This is one of the primary functions of art for this world of ours is so chaotic, so confused, so disordered. The artist, through keener sense and feeling can create order out of disorder.

der. He can select, rearrange, balance and organize. He can show how life should be. Rembrandt can teach you the dignity of man or Elizabeth Barrett can teach you real love. We can see peasants as Millet and ballet girls as Degas. Artists can suggest an ordered life by contrasting to the disorder that exists and lead to a wiser and freer life by exposing the evil men do as Picasso did in "Guernica". So the artist, through his wisdom, creates harmony and value for us. Look for a sense of form and how it can create feelings through associations. In the "Birth of Venus" the sureness of the drawing in Venus gives us a good, quiet feeling compared with the twisted tormented feeling the hair creates. How true these conflicting emotions are to life. In the "Girl Before a Mirror", how well the forms created by Picasso go with the theme and build up the feelings and tensions of the moment as developed by Professor Shapiro. Look for quality. The quality of the feminine, refined Venus developed by Botticelli as compared with the fleshy, coarse, agitated Venus interpretations by Peter Paul Rubens. Picasso creates a feeling of spiritual solemnity in depicting so emotional a phase of life, by using the forms and colors, outlined in black, to create a feeling associated with stained glass. Study and develop these meanings of a painting, for the more complete the intellectual response, the more complete the pleasure. The more you know about something the more you enjoy it and a great work of art cannot be absorbed casually. But how much more pleasure will we derive from something we have to work to attain. How little something will mean to us if we take in all aspects it has to

offer in one glance. How much more the "Birth of Venus", the "Guernica" mural, or any great work of art will mean to us if we search out the meanings behind them and receive what they have to offer. Only through an approach of this sort can the great masterpieces of any age be understood and appreciated by those who have the capacity and are willing to make the attempt.

CHAPTER IX  
A WORD ABOUT MODERN SCULPTURE



Our age has seen the sculptor's art develop into more different directions, and with more different concepts, than at any other period in the history of art. In earlier periods sculpture was essentially a religious expression and the most important of the plastic arts. Today it is less commonly appreciated than painting or the graphic arts. When the sculptors followed the artists away from the academic realism that had engulfed their field ever since the genius Michelangelo laid down his tools in the sixteenth century, they had a much more difficult



problem than did the painter. The theory of painting itself is abstract. Since painting is done on a two-dimensional flat surface the artist must create an illusion of three dimensions. Therefore if even a realistic illusion is theoretically abstract on a flat surface, the layman finds it easier to accept a complete abstraction in this medium. The sculptor, except for the relief carver who models out from a flat surface but does not work completely in the round, works directly in space. He deals directly in three dimensions. When seeing something so reminiscent of actuality the layman finds it hard to accept an abstract form. Furthermore, the volume humans are most conscious of is the human form. It is very difficult to create other forms that will be acceptable to the majority of people. Most sculptors, therefore, maintain the human figure as reference if not the immediate subject. These factors always limit the understanding of the modern sculptor, especially if he tries to discover what Henry Moore calls "the inner vitality of a shape", or when a sculptor like Jacob Epstein seeks human and psychological as well as esthetic content.

We have seen that the definition of art was an intangible one based on creation. The sculptor's definition of his art again implies a creative, esthetic purpose rather than realistic copying of natural forms. "Sculpture", said Michelangelo, "consists of a process of removing the superfluous in a block of stone in order to reach the essential." Eric Gill has defined it as "anything made by men in three-dimensional form which is not made to serve a physical utilitarian purpose, a thing more

delightful than useful". The Greeks used a word for "statue" which means simply "a thing of delight". The young sculptor Gaudier remarked that "civilizations begin with sculpture and end with it".<sup>1</sup> "Sculpture is the conversion of any mass of matter without formal meaning into a mass that has been given formal meaning as a result of the human will."<sup>2</sup>

Sculptors today are searching for pure form that is not necessarily linked to subject matter. It can be, or as the cubist painters showed, it may be a rearrangement into a more perfect grouping of planes and volumes. But it is the mechanics of form that is absorbing the interests of many modern sculptors. Others probe the inner meaning of nature and attempt to feel the pure form of nature. Sculptors today search for the relationships of forms rather than the form itself, and they include space in that relationship, because sculpture is an art of space. The space between forms is therefore given as much consideration as the form itself. They attempt to feel the unity of the whole composition in space rather than a succession of head on views.

Sculptors are trying to express the beauty of their materials. They emphasize the grain of wood, the roughness of stone, and the way certain types of marble lend themselves to high polish. They attempt to feel the rhythms of rocks, trees, shells, and other natural forms so that their work will suit their material.

At the present time there are far too many good, imagina-

1) Stanley Casson, Sculpture of Today, Studio Publications Inc., New York, 1939, p. 1

2) R.H.Wilenski, The Meaning of Modern Sculpture, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1932, p. 85

tive, active sculptors working in all countries to name them all. Some of the better pioneers of these new paths are the following sculptors, although they are but a small representation:

Constantine Brancusi, the Rumanian sculptor, works for pure form and the beauty of natural material, and has been instrumental in clearing sculpture from traces of representation.

Henry Moore, the British sculptor, aims to suggest the pent-up power and beauty that he feels in natural objects like trees or slabs of marble or rocks that are honed by wind and water.

Alexander Archipenko, the Russian sculptor, experiments with many mediums, metal, stone, wood, clay, marble, and plastics. All of his work has a wonderful feeling for form and an appreciation of the material he has used.

ALEXANDER  
ARCHIPENKO



*"The Bride"*  
(Terra cotta)

Isamu Noguchi is another of the most inventive sculptors who uses aluminum along with marble and other contemporary media.

Alexander Calder combines abstract designs with a great deal of ingenuity and calls them mobiles. They are interesting because they involve motion and continuous, unpredictable change.

There are many sculptors from the modern movement, like Maillol, Lehmbruck, Mestrovic and Epstein who felt the underlying rhythm, power and expression of form and their material without radical distortion, although Epstein occasionally arouses a furor with an abstract, symbolic piece.

These modern sculptors, as the painters, are expressing themselves and reflecting the thinking of their era. Since this paper deals primarily with painting I leave you with just an introduction into their vast and complex world and I hope the introduction stimulates you to enlarge your areas of interest. Search out examples and study them and see how the highly polished, glistening, simplified, expressive "Bird in Flight" by Brancusi gives you the feeling of that wonderful, exhilarating moment of flight, and how lifeless a model of a realistic bird with spread wings would be by comparison. Sculpture is an expressive medium, and many sculptors feel it is the only pure art, the most permanent, and the nearest to God's creation.

CHAPTER X  
GENERAL SUMMARY

Modern art has now grown old enough to take its place in the sequence of styles that have been evolving since primitive man first painted. It is old enough to have developed certain characteristics that have become ways of thinking and working, and so lend themselves to definitions. Rather than an enemy to the arts of the past <sup>we should</sup> I prefer to call it a successor to or evolution from the past, for as we have seen, the roots of modern art come from that past.

I have defined art as a creative esthetic expression of human experience, said through a certain art medium, conditioned by the era in which it is said. I feel that modern art fulfills that definition.

Today we are entering into a new phase of history. There are social and economic reorganizations. New materials are being introduced that are revolutionizing the methods of transportation, communication, production, and the structural principles of building. Modern art is relating itself to that change. It is becoming part of that life. The techniques of machinery and our way of life make ornaments and decorations futile and academic, a waste of time and money.<sup>1</sup> This lack of ornamentation and simplification has given abstract art and modern building and designing a great deal in common. Le Corbusier, Van der Rohe, and Gropius, three of our great contemporary architects are closely connected with the modern movements in their coun-

1) Herbert Reed, Art and Industry, Harcourt Brace and Company, New York, 1938, p. 3



tries. The two forms, abstract painting and modern architecture have certain common principles. As Mr. Hitchcock<sup>1</sup> states, "...certain basic assumptions began to be made...which were later to provide the esthetic premises both of abstract painting and of modern architecture....One assumption...is that the artistic value of a picture or building resides not in the interest of its individual elements, but in their physical relationships to one another."

This relationship and acceptance holds true in other fields as well as in architecture. Rather than becoming more separated from living today, modern art is beginning to show ever increasing influence. Rouault has designed windows for a church in southern France, which also contains a Bonnard painting, Leger mosaics, and a Lurcat tapestry. Matisse is completing a chapel that follows his design and will contain his paintings. Henry Moore created a Madonna and child for a church in England. The Liturgical Society has commissioned a number of modern sculptors to create models from which replicas could be made to be used as an active persuasion to worship. Ivan Mestrovic is perhaps the outstanding name in the group.

The Miller Company of Meridan, Connecticut, dealing with industrial lighting, is doing a great deal with applying art to industry. They use abstract and non-objective art as the basis for design and color relationships, especially in their advertising layouts. The paintings of Mondrian and other Dutch "neo-

1) H.R.Hitchcock, Painting Toward Architecture, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1948, p. 13

plasticists", of Braque, Leger, Gris, and Picasso, were studied for the arrangement of mass and volume. The sculpture of Arp, Calder, and others were studied for their sense of architectural structure and their experiments in enclosing, limiting, or defining space. An interesting sidelight is that many Miller engineers began collections of modern abstract art themselves when they saw that it could speak their language.<sup>1</sup>

Hallmark is putting out a new line of Christmas greeting cards using famous art works of Picasso, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cezanne. The Ballet has found the work of the modern artist fitting for its form of expression, and Braque, Chirico, Derain, Gris, Leger, Picasso, and Utrillo are but a few who have designed for it. Chagall, Derain, Dufy, Gris, Pascin, and Picasso are but a few of the many who have illustrated books. Laurencin has influenced dressmaking. Dufy, Matisse, and others have designed screens and fabrics. Modern art is becoming more and more a part of our life. It certainly is more at home on the walls of our modern buildings than are the paintings that bedecked a Victorian mansion or a Renaissance palace. Our thinking and science have advanced beyond the thinking and science that led to the search for perspective, anatomy, and the realism of the Italian Renaissance masters.

{ Our art, therefore, } is growing out of our own experiences, and is being expressed in a pattern that follows our way of living and thinking. } As Eric Newton, the brilliant British critic has so frequently pointed out, all experiences from disgust to

1) Aline B. Louchheim, "Abstractions on the Assembly Line", Art News, December, 1947, Volume XLVI, Number 10, p. 25

ecstasy, from despair to hope, from boredom to enthusiasm have been expressed in the art of the past. But during the six centuries of painting in the western world, from the first great western artist Giotto, until Cezanne's studies, they have been expressed in visual experiences. The artists always gave their emotions through their eyes, solving the problem by "what do things look like". There are millions of solutions: Botticelli solved it in terms of shape, Michelangelo in terms of structure, Titian in terms of color, Rembrandt in terms of light and dark, Monet in terms of movement and vibrating light color, but all revealed their emotions in terms of the visible world. Anger had to be portrayed by an angry man. The artists did not realize that forms and colors could create the feeling of anger and that one does not feel anger himself when viewing a grimacing, jumping man. Instead, one is apt to be amused.

However, as we have seen, not all art has been concerned with the visible world. Prehistoric art, the art of primitive Africa, the art of China, the art of India, and the art of Persia all dealt with the intangible things of life and tried to express them through the complete mind rather than through the eyes alone. Modern art is seeking that experience. It differs from their result, just as Chinese art differs from African art, because the modern experience is different.

To those who feel that modern art is insincere, I would like to point out that there are too many artists practicing it all over the world, many starving and sacrificing for their beliefs, for them all to be insincere. Some of the followers of the move-

ment, who make formulas without understanding or conviction, may be insincere, but that is true of all life, not only of art. [ The artist today, rather than attempting to hold a mirror to nature, is attempting to penetrate beneath the surface. He has turned his eyes inward, and an introvert is bound to be more baffling than an extrovert. After six hundred years artists had achieved extraordinary technical ability in depicting the world of the eye. Today, after but half a century of exploring the world of the mind, they are still primitives. Tradition is built up slowly by decades of trial and error. Modern tradition is in its infancy, the climax is centuries away. But I think we will all agree that it is more stimulating to live in an age of experimental primitivism rather than in a period of decadence or even maturity. New frontiers and expanding horizons have a thrill for all of us when they are not clouded by fear and mistrust. ]

This thesis has been an introductory one into the world of the modern artist. The work and philosophy of the modern sculptor was barely touched upon. Modern architecture and its relation to modern painting is a study in itself. The development of art in industry, the elaboration of the "form follows function" theories, and the design development of our age are the studies that should be concentrated upon. The twentieth, not the sixteenth century, should be the theme of our Masters and Doctors research papers in art. Candidates in other fields put into practice and attempt to clarify the most recent developments in Guidance or Testing. Browse through the thesis work in art and see how little work, relatively, is put into contemporary re-

search compared with historical studies.

*and* [The most common reason for disliking modern art is that it is not understood.] I have attempted to develop a tolerant attitude and to open the door into the home of modern art. However the step inside has to be taken by yourself. If you don't like one room, go to another, for there are many different ones. Nothing pleases everyone. [No one likes every piece of accepted great music.] And if you don't like the modern home, by all means go back to your Victorian mansion. But look into the modern home first in order to make your comparison. Hang a modern print on your wall. Choose a good one; perhaps a Matisse, Degas, Renoir or Cezanne as a start. Compare it with a Victorian print and see for yourself which one you would rather live with. See which one causes the greatest stimulation. Open your mind, fill it with knowledge, and allow art to raise you above the sordid realities of everyday existence. Your imagination requires food just as your body does, and modern art can become an inexhaustible supply. Learn to look at the picture itself, rather than expecting the picture to mirror something you have seen elsewhere. And I would like to conclude, by over-emphasizing that you must look at a lot of pictures. Look over and over again at pictures from the past and from the present, because understanding and appreciation is a process of acquired learning.



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