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CREATIVE ART

by

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CENTRAL

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I hate like poison to talk. Artists talk in paint-  
he feels it; the child's mind goes all round his house -  
words do not come easily. But I have put my hat in my pocket  
may show both sides of his house at once - he feels the house  
because I know many of you cordially detest 'Modern Art'.  
as a whole, why shouldn't he show it? By and by he goes to  
There are some kinds that need detesting, done for the sake of  
school and they train all the feeling out of him. He is told  
being bizarre, outrageous, shocking, and making ashamed. This  
to draw only what he sees, he is turned into a little camera.  
kind we need not discuss but will busy ourselves with what is  
to be a mechanical thing - to forget that he has feelings or  
more correctly termed 'Creative Art'. I am not going to tell  
that he has anything to express; he only knows that he is  
you about the 'ists and 'isms and their leaders, and when they  
copy what is before him - the art part of him dies. He is  
lived and when they died. You can get that out of books. They  
is moving swiftly; and the tempo of life has changed. There  
all probably contributed something to the movement, even the  
now a few years back, is now old. There have been  
wild ones. The Art world was fed up - saturated with lifeless  
expansions in the direction of light and movement. It was  
stodge - something had to happen and it did. I want to tell  
last few years these have altered everything. I want to tell  
you some of the things that I puzzled about when I first saw  
the influence. Isn't it reasonable to expect that it would have  
it and wondered what it was all about; it stirred me all up  
to keep pace with all the rest? The romantic little stories  
yet I couldn't leave it alone. I wanted to know why!  
and the mawkish little songs - didn't satisfy my love.

When I went to Paris in 1911 I was lucky enough to  
should the empty little pictures? The academic painting  
have an introduction to a very modern artist. Immediately I  
mid-nineteenth century in England had entirely lost touch with  
entered his studio I was interested. Later I took lessons  
art in running after sentiment.

from him, yet strange to say, it was his wife, who was not an  
When Paul Cezanne, the great French man, who did so  
artist at all, who first gave me very many of the vital little  
much to show the world that there was something so much bigger  
side lights on 'Modern Art'. She really loved and appreciated  
and better for art, came - he was hooted at, called crazy!  
it, not for her husband's sake, (they scrapped) but for its  
ridiculed! How we realize what he, and the man who followed after,  
own sake. She evidently admired his work more than she ad-  
did to open the way - to change our vision. Cezanne's real  
mired him. He was a fine teacher and his work was interest-  
business was not to make pictures, but to create forms that  
ing and compelling, but his wife read and thought and watched  
would express the emotions that he felt for what he had learned  
and she had the knack of saying things.

to meet; he lost interest in his work as soon as he had made it  
To return to the term 'Creative Art' - this is the  
express as much as he had grasped.

definition a child once gave it - "I think and then I draw a line  
round my think." Children grasp these things more quickly than  
Art' are irritating and foreign" - one thing is certain, it is  
we do. They are more creative than grown ups. It has not been  
vital and alive; the most conservative artists, although they are  
knocked out of them. When a child draws he does so because he  
fant and real, are consciously or unconsciously trying to say  
wants to express something. If he draws a house, he never fails  
work. They know that if they do not - it is going to look like  
to make the smoke pour out of the chimney, that moves, it is alive,



he feels it; the child's mind goes all round his idea - he may show both sides of his house at once - he feels the house as a whole, why shouldn't he show it? By and by he goes to school and they train all the feeling out of him. He is told to draw only what he sees, he is turned into a little camera, to be a mechanical thing - to forget that he has feelings or that he has anything to express; he only knows that he is to copy what is before him - the art part of him dies. The world is moving swiftly, and the tempo of life has changed. What was new a few years back, is now old. There have been terrific expansions in the direction of light and movement: within the last few years these have altered everything. Painting has felt the influence. Isn't it reasonable to expect that art would have to keep pace with all the rest? The romantic little stories - and the mawkish little songs - don't satisfy us any longer. Why should the empty little pictures? The academic painting of the mid-nineteenth century in England had entirely lost touch with art in running after sentiment.

When 'Paul Cezanne', the great French man, who did so much to show the world that there was something so much bigger and better for art, came - he was hooted at, called crazy! ridiculed! Now we realize what he, and the men who followed after, did to open the way - to change our vision. Cezanne's real business was not to make pictures, but to create forms that would express the emotions that he felt for what he had learned to see: he lost interest in his work as soon as he had made it express as much as he had grasped.

'Lawren Harris' says, "The immediate results of 'Creative Art' are irritating and foreign" - one thing is certain, it is vital and alive; the most conservative artists, although they may rant and rail, are consciously or unconsciously pepping up their work. They know that if they do not - it is going to look like for, namely, trying to grasp the spirit of the thing itself.



'last year's hat' when it goes into the exhibitions. They are using more design - fresher color - and the very fervor with which they denounce modern art shows how it stirs them up. So also with an onlooker, it may stir and irritate him but isn't it more entertaining, and stimulating, to even feel something unpleasant than to feel nothing at all, - just a void? There is such a lot of drab stoginess in the world. It's delicious to get a thrill out of something. the surface impression. It is hard to get at, this.

You must Willinski says "A high proportion of the naturalistic painting of the world was done in the nineteenth century, due partly to the fact that the invention of the camera greatly enhanced this technique." Certain of the camera's limitations are now universally admitted. The camera cannot comment. The camera cannot select. The camera cannot feel - it is purely mechanical. By the aid of our own reinforcements we can perceive roughly what we desire to perceive and ignore as far as is physically possible what we do not desire to perceive. No work of real value is produced by an artist unless his hand obeys his mind. The camera has no mind. We may copy something as faithfully as the camera but, unless we bring to our picture something additional - something creative - something of ourselves - our picture does not live. It is but a poor copy of unfelt nature, we look at it and straightway we forget it, because we have brought nothing to it - we have had no new experience. all distorted, but with

through, "Creative art is fresh seeing". Why there is all the difference in copying, and creating, that there is in walking down a hard straight cement pavement, and in walking down a winding grassy lane with flowers peeping everywhere, and the excitement of never knowing what is just round the next bend.

would have Great Art of all ages remains stable, because the feelings it awakens are independent of time and space. The Old Masters did the very things that the serious moderns of today are struggling for, namely, trying to grasp the spirit of the thing itself rather of man suitable for a divine image, thought away the flesh and the



than its surface appearance, the reality, the "I Am" of the thing, the thing that means "you", whether you are in your Sunday best or your work-day worst - or the bulk, weight and impenetrability of the mountain, no matter if its sides are bare or covered with pine, the bigger actuality of the thing, the part that is the same, no matter what the conditions of light or seasons are upon it - the form, force and volume of the thing, not the surface impression. It is hard to get at, this. You must dig way down into your subject, and into yourself. And in your struggle to accomplish it, the usual aspect of the thing may have to be cast aside. This leads to 'distortion', which is often confused with 'caricature', but which is really the emotional struggle of the artist to express intensely what he feels. This very exaggeration or distortion raises the thing out of the ordinary seeing into a more spiritual sphere, the spirit dominating over the subject matter. From 'distortion' we take another step on to 'abstraction', where the forms of representation are forgotten and created forms expressing emotions in space rather than objects take their place, where form is so simplified and abstracted that the material side, or objects, are forgotten - only the spiritual remains.

Breadth. This use of distortion accounts for the living qualities in many of the Old Masters. The dear, queer old saints with hands and faces and bodies all distorted, but with their spirits shining through, with such a feeling of intense beauty. It was not that these men could not draw. Do you think that their things would have lived all through the centuries if there was nothing more to them than bad drawing? It was the striving for the spiritual above the material. Had they made the bodies ordinary the eye would have been satisfied with the material side. It would have looked no further - and would have soon tired. But being raised up above the material and spiritual has endured and will for all ages. The early Christian 'artists', seeking to perceive an aspect of man suitable for a divine image, thought away the flesh and dis-



torted the human body to make it as uncorporeal as possible.

As the ear can be trained by listening to good music - so the eye can be trained by seeing good pictures. People complain that modern art is ugly. That depends on what they are looking for and what their standard of beauty is. In descriptive, or romantic art, they are looking for a story or a memory that is brought back to them. It is not the beauty of the picture in itself that they observe. What they want is the re-living of some scene or the re-visiting of some place -- a memory.

The beauty concealed in modern art consists more in the building up of a structural, unified, beautiful whole - an enveloped idea - a spiritual unity - a forgetting of the individual objects in the building up of the whole.

By the right disposition of lines and spaces, the eye may be led hither and thither through the picture, so that our eyes and our consciousness rest comfortably within it, and are satisfied, also by the use of the third dimension, that is, by retrogression and projection, or, to be plainer, by the going back and the coming forward in the picture - by the creation of volume, we do not remain on the flat surface, having only height and breadth, but are enabled to move backward or forward within the picture, then we begin to feel space, we feel that our objects are set in space, that they are surrounded by air. We may see before us a dense forest, but we feel the breathing space among the trees. We know, that dense though they may appear, there is air among them, that they can move a little - and breathe. It is not like a brick wall - dead - with no space for light and air between the bricks. It is full of moving light, playing over the different planes of the interlocked branches. There are great sweeping directions of line. Its feelings, its colour, its depth, its smell, its sounds and silences bound together into one great thing and in its unfathomable centre is its soul. That is what



we are trying to get at - to express - that is the thing that matters - the very essence of it. There are different kinds of vision. The three most common are - Practical, Curious and Imaginative. Because these are habitual in daily life we have become accustomed to use them when looking at pictures and all three of them cause their owner to be interested in practical matters - in the data which the picture records - in all matters of skill - in story telling, etc. If any one using only these three types of vision looks at a picture in which the trees, let us say, have been made universal instead of particular - that is to say in which they have had all their pictorially meaningless branches and wiggles omitted, and the essential shape then changed to meet the needs of design, he is more or less incensed. His practical vision at once asks, what are they? When told they are trees he is angry and says, "They don't look like it". The fact that the artist has aimed at another goal than that of copying is beyond his comprehension. It doesn't exist for a person using only these three types of vision.

Some of you will have read the Canadian "Art Movement". The attainment of further adventure in seeing pictures depends on what is called pure vision. This is the vision that sees objects as ends in themselves, disconnecting them from all practical and human associations. In that direction only lie the new horizons which have been revealed for us by the modern movement. All forms in nature can be reduced to primary geometric solids - that is, a mountain may be represented by a cone or pyramid - a tree top as a cube or sphere - the trunk as a cylinder --

When a picture is looked at, the relation of its forms and spaces should be felt emotionally rather than thought about intellectually. Today we have almost lost the ability to respond to pictures emotionally - that is with aesthetic emotion. Modern Art endeavours to bring this ability to our consciousness again.



evolution: The question of things not looking what they are is often a stumbling block to the observer who would like to understand Modern Art. There may be a bigger thing that the Artist is striving for in his picture than the faithful portraying of some particular trees or other objects. It may be some great emotion that he feels sweeping through the landscape. We will say there is a high mountain of overpowering strength in his picture that seems to dominate everything - to make the rest cower and shrink - possibly that is the thing he focusses his attention on, the thing he is trying to express. He sacrifices everything to that emotion, changing his forms - selecting, omitting, bending every other thing to meet that one desire. Everything in his picture must help to envelope and unify his idea. at first may be less copy great variety of his motives, he inevitably develops

of design. It would, I feel, be impossible to speak on Canada and Creative Art without mentioning the group of seven, and the splendid work they have done and are doing for art in Canada.

colour part Some of you will have read the Canadian "Art Movement", by F. B. Houser. It is in our Public Library which, by the way, has some very helpful Art Books. The "Year Book of Canadian Art" by Burtram Brooker, and "Modern French Painters" by Jan Gordon - these books and others are a great help to those, isolated like we are from the big art centres of the world. The Provincial Library also has some fine books on Art and doubtless the librarians, if they find sufficient interest is taken in this subject, will add more. The "Group of Seven" consists of a small group of men, some with academical training, some without; most of them are Canadians by birth, all are Canadians in the best sense of the word. They were mostly busy men with livings to make, but they loved art, and in their holidays they went up to the country above Lake Superior to paint, and were enthralled by it, put their best into it, and took the best out of it. I will quote what one of their members, Lawren Harris, says of their



evolution: "The source of our art is not in the achievements of other artists in other lands, although it has learned a great deal from these. Our art is founded on a long and growing love and understanding of the North, in an ever clearer experience of oneness with the informing spirit of the whole land, and a strange brooding sense of Mother Nature fostering a new race and a new age. So the Canadian artist in Ontario was drawn North and there at first devoted himself to Nature's outward aspect until a thorough acquaintance with her forms, her growth and idiosyncracies and the almost endless diversity of individual presences in lakes, rivers, valleys, forests, etc., led him to feel the spirit that informs all these. Thus living in and wandering over the North and at first more or less copying a great variety of her motives, he inevitably developed a sense of design, selection, rhythm and relation in individual conformity to her aspect, moods and spirit. Then followed a period of decorative treatment, of her great wealth and design and colour patterns, conveying the moods of seasons, weather and places. Then followed an intensification of mood, that simplified form into deeper meaning and was more vigorously selected, and sought to have no element in the work that did not contribute to a unified, intense expression. The next step was the utilization of the elements of the North in depth, in three dimensions, giving a fuller meaning, a more real sense of the presence of the informing spirit."

These men are a group that Canadians may well be proud of. They have opened up wonderful fields for art in Canada, burst themselves free, blazed the trail, stood the abuse and lived up to their convictions. At Wembley in 1924 their work was recognized by critics familiar with the best modern work of Europe; later they exhibited by invitation in Paris, as well as all the big centres in the United States. One of the splendid things about them is their willingness to help



those who are struggling to see things in a broader way. What about our side of Canada -- The Great West, standing before us, big and strong and beautiful? What art do we want for her? Art ancient or modern? She's young, but she's very big. If we dressed her in the art dresses of the older countries, she would burst them, so we will have to make her a dress of her own. Not that the art of the Old World is not great and glorious and beautiful, but what they have to express over there is not the same as we have to express over here. It is different. The spirit is different. Everyone knows that the moment they go from the Old Country to the new, or from the new to the old, he feels the difference at once. European painters have sought to express Europe. Canadian painters must strive to express Canada. Misty landscapes and gentle cows do not express Western Canada -- even the cows know that. I said to a farmer in Scotland once: "That fence wouldn't keep out a Canadian cow." "You are right," he replied, "it would not. Your cows are accustomed to fighting their way through the bush. When they are shipped over here, it takes twice as many men and twice as high a fence to make them stay put." So, if the country produces different cow-spirit, isn't it reasonable that it should produce different artist-spirit? All Her great forests, wide spaces and mighty mountains and the great feel of it, all, should produce courageous artists, seeing and feeling things in a fresh, creative way. Modern, we may call it, but remember all modern art is not jazz. Canada wants something strong, big, dignified and spiritual that shall make her artists better for doing it, and her people better for seeing it. And we artists need the people at our back, not to throw cold water over us, or starve us with their cold, clammy silence, but to give us their sympathy and support. I do not mean money support. I mean moral support, whether the artists are doing it in the old way or in the new way, it does not matter,



so long as it is in the big way with the feel and the spirit of Canada behind it. ~~Wolves sly and fierce. The~~ ~~is express~~ People need not like creative art. It is not a sin if they don't, but they lose an awful lot of joy out of life by not trying to understand it. It opens up a new world for those who seek to understand it. Lots of artists sort of hanker for the adventure of it, but are afraid of the public. They couldn't stand up against the - sometimes just - and sometimes unjust ridicule of the people or the press. They squeeze and little themselves, hoping to please or sell. I tell you it is better to be a streetsweeper or a char or a boarding-house keeper than to lower your standard. These may spoil your temper, but they need not dwarf your soul. ~~they show the part of him that~~ ~~would not~~ Some say the West is unpaintable - and our forests monotonous. Oh! Just let them open their eyes and look. It isn't pretty. It's only just magnificent, tremendous. The oldest art of our West, the art of the Indians is in spirit very modern, full of liveness and vitality. They went for and got so many of the very things that we modern artists are striving for to-day. One frequently hears the Indians carvings and designs called grotesque and hideous. That depends on the vision of the on-looker. The Indian used distortion or exaggeration to gain his ends. All nature to him seethed with the supernatural. Everything, even the commonest, inanimate objects - mats, dishes, etc. - possessed a spirit. The foundation that the Indian built his art upon was his Totem. He did not worship it, but he did reverence it tremendously. Most of the totems were animal representations, thus animal life played a great part in the life of the Indian and his art. They endowed their totem with magic powers. In the totem image, the aspect or part of the animal that was to work magic was distorted by exaggeration. It was made as the totem-maker saw it -- only more so. The Indians were supposed to partake of the nature of their totems. That



is to say, Eagles were supposed to be daring and fierce, Ravens cunning and tricky, Wolves sly and fierce. The Beaver is expressed by his huge front teeth, his hands usually clasping a stick and his cross-hatched tail tucked up in front of him, these are his most particular and characteristic emblems. They represent him as a brave, splendid creature, an ancestor to be proud of. There is all the difference in the world between their beaver and the insignificant little animal that we take for our national emblem. We belittle him, only give him his surface representation. The Indian goes deeper. He expresses the thing that is the beaver, glorifying him, showing his brave little self that can saw down trees, and build his house, energetic, courageous; they show the part of him that would still be beaver even if he were skinned. Here is a striking instance of the difference between Representative and Modern Art.

In the next room you will see two different types of pictures. Some will like one kind, some the other, and some neither. The subjects are much the same, but the viewpoint is different. In the older canvases things are carefully and honestly correct as to data. The late Dr. Newcombe, our best authority on West Coast material, agreed to that. The others are the newer school. Here I wanted something more - something deeper, not so concerned with what they looked like, as what they felt like, and really were - sweeping away the unnecessary and adding something more, something bigger.

It is not my own pictures I am pleading for. They are before you to like or to dislike, as you please. That is immaterial, for the joy of the artist is in the creating - the making of his picture, when he has gone as far as he understands - pushed it to the limits of his knowledge and experience - then for him that picture is a thing of the past, over, and done with. It then passes on to the onlooker - to get out of it what there



is for him in it - what appeals to him - what speaks to him, but the struggles - hopes - desires of the Artist are all centred on his next problem - how to make his next picture a little better, profiting by his failures and experiences in the last, determined to carry the next one a little further along - to look higher - and to search deeper - to try to get a little nearer to the reality of the thing.

The plea that I make to you is for a more tolerant attitude toward the bigger vision of creative art - a quiet searching on your part - to see if there is sincerity - before you condemn.

The National Gallery at Ottawa is trying to help the whole of Canada to a better appreciation of Art by sending loan collections of both conservative and modern pictures over the country. In the West the modern work was rejected - they were asked not to send any more. How can we grow if we are not permitted to see the progressive work? When other parts of Canada are growing and want to grow, why must we stand still?

When I was young, I had a great fear and dislike of monkeys. By and by I came to see this was foolish and I decided to get over it. So I went, every opportunity I got, to the London Zoo and I looked the monkeys fairly and squarely in the face, then I got interested, then fascinated. Now I own one and she has brought all kinds of fun into my life. If Ottawa should send out any more modern work for us to see, do think of my monkey and remember that tastes can be acquired.

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