

"IT HAPPENED"

Some years ago, in a Freehold back yard, alongside the door of the garage where the family jitney lives, there sprang up one spring an exotic looking plant that after a bit put forth some ghostly flowers. The town florist, being consulted, declared it to be a *Nicotina* plant.

"John," said the master of the house to the big darky who had worked there for twenty years, "how do you suppose a tobacco plant came to grow up by our garage?"

"I've been thinking about that, too," said John, "and I think I knows how it happened. That's just where I always knocks out my pipe when I goes to clean the car."

We bring you this month, just as it sprang from the journalistic soil of this same Freehold, another little plant with such blossoms as it bears.

How did it come to grow there? Well, I've been thinking that over too. Maybe *le Bon Dieu* knocked his pipe out thereabouts. Or, maybe, the Devil threw a cigarette away as he passed.

Anyhow, it HAPPENED.

J. B. KERFOOT.

The following EDITORIAL and THREE LETTERS appeared in the Freehold, New Jersey, *Transcript* of February 3, 10, 24 and March 3, 1922. The FOURTH LETTER is a personal communication here published for the first time.

WHAT IS TRUE ART?

We ask the question with all humility because we know nothing about it and would like to be instructed. After a careful reading of the critics as they have found way for their ideas in the daily and less frequent press, for some three or four decades, we have yet to find any work of modern art, public or private, that is worthy of a place in the farthest up back attic—not to mention a public place. The Lincoln cent, the silver dollar and the half dollar, the gold pieces, the printed currency, bonds, etc., were all the despair of critics. And the most recent of them all—the Peace Dollar—has come in for a virulent lambasting.

There is a raucous howl every time a more or less distinguished or misguided sculptor attempts to make a statue of any notable man or woman. The gathering of worthies in the Capitol corridor at Washington, all the productions of distinguished artists, has been termed "the chamber of horrors," and this or other slighting epithets have been applied some time or other to almost every other collection of paintings or sculpture by somebody.

To the untutored mind of the ordinary individual most of these artistic efforts were grateful and satisfying until the critics got aboard and told just how rotten and disgraceful they were. We have come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as true art, or if there is no man or woman has ever succeeded in expressing it in any of the work on exhibition—that is, if we believe the critics.

On the other hand, if an artist produces something that pleases, satisfies, elevates the public sense; or if by free-hand cartoon he is able to

instruct or amuse, or serves to show up iniquity, hypocrisy, or crime and thus improve or defend public morals or private virtue, he has served a practical purpose and is a true enough artist altho he has committed all the crimes in the artistic calendar. Now we anticipate that there will be some critics, maybe right here in Freehold, who will immediately feel sorry that we have thus exposed our ignorance. Let them save their feelings on that score and tell an expectant public their definition of true art. We want to know.

"WHAT IS TRUE ART?"

To the Editor of *The Transcript*:

Dear Sir:—In the editorial columns of your paper last week, the question is asked, "What is true art?" and after some discussion of art critics, and their criticisms of the Peace Dollar, and some other applications of the art of modern artists, the question is left in such a way that it leaves an "expectant public" with eyes fixed upon a few art lovers of Freehold, awaiting their reply.

Fortunately the writer has not yet seen the Peace Dollar, and therefore is not forced to pass judgment upon it, but is free to discuss "What is true art?"

Why not ask the questions, "What is true Religion?" and "What is true Philosophy, or true Government?" Have they yet been defined to the satisfaction of all people?

In Art as in every other realm of human endeavor, there are to be found different parties or schools of thought. As in politics we find Democrats and Republicans; in religion we find Protest-



tants and Catholics; so in art we find liberals and conservatives, or Impressionists and Realists. Then too in art as in government we find radicals on both right and left sides, who like monarchs and anarchists can not explain themselves, nor agree with even those of their own classes. In government there have been individuals of opposing parties, whose achievements have equally benefited humanity, and yet their methods of performing the work have been severely criticised by their contemporaries of the other party who would approach the situation from the opposite direction.

All schools of artists are trying by different methods to arrive at the same goal, that of harmoniously revealing to the untrained or unperceiving eye the great fundamental truths which nature so subtly conceals.

There have been those geniuses, in all branches of human effort, whom we love to honor for their achievements. In art they are often called the great masters, or sometimes the "old" masters, but they are not all dead yet, neither have all yet been born. They are those bold spirits who dare to disregard parties, schools of thought, critics, and established human systems, and courageously express, in their own way, truth and beauty to the world as they see them. They are not merely masters of their art but men, masters of themselves.

Once while studying painting the writer asked his instructor "whom the art student should strive to please, the public, his instructor, or himself?" The instructor replied "It depends upon whom you mean by the Public. If you mean the people of any one time or place I would say, no; but if you mean the eternal flow of humanity I would say yes."

I commend the writer, of last week, for his fearlessness and disregard for art critics, when he said that he believed that any artist who by free hand cartoon or whatever method, pleased and elevated humanity, was a true artist and served a useful purpose. Art critics are more plentiful than real artists. They abound in art schools and are the bane of the life of students trying to do constructive work. All art students, at some time in their early career, criticise the masters, but after much long hard work they stumble upon some hidden truth and then they find that, alas the one whom they criticised knew and used that truth. After repeating this process a number of times they finally begin to wonder and refrain from criticism.

If only more people would realize that real artists are first of all real people and would forget the artist, with long hair, that they saw in movies, or in the latest book of popular fiction, or else would class them with the movie farmer in the linen duster with long chin whiskers. If they would then stop in the "front room" of the public library and look for some books on ancient and modern art and next go to the great free Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts of New York City, and see some of the real art works of real men and not content themselves with poor reproduc-

tions of works of novices. If they would sit down there and enjoy and study the ones they like regardless of critics and others, they would remove their hats in humility before Beauty and would return to their homes realizing that real art is the offspring of real life and cannot be defined.

Yours very cordially,

W. RHEA MOREAU.

Freehold, Feb. 6, 1922.

"WHAT IS TRUE ART?"

To the Editor of *The Transcript*:

Dear Sir:—When a man—or a newspaper—makes, in all good faith, so flabbergasting a demand as did your recent editorial on art; a volunteer expounder of the facts does all that can be asked of him at one sitting if he clears away as thoroughly as Mr. W. Rhea Moreau's interesting letter did, the basic misconceptions of the request.

It is, then, with a grateful acknowledgment of our common debt to Mr. Moreau that I venture to address you on the same subject; taking the, so to say, clearing in the woods that this letter leaves us as a basis of enlargement and comment.

Mr. Moreau has explained why it is that a universally valid definition of "true art" is not to be had. He has also, by inference at least, indicated that we must, each for himself, by actual contact with works of art, seek our own understanding of art's nature and value.

All that I seek to do is to add a few specific hints that may serve as guide posts to the beginning of such a journey of discovery.

"The arts," says the dictionary, "are distinguished as the *esthetic* or *fine arts*, the arts of beauty, and the *useful*, *industrial* and *mechanic arts*, or arts of utility." The italics are the dictionary's.

I assume, as does Mr. Moreau, that your query refers to the fine arts. And, if this is so, then it will be helpful to point out:

(1) That the basic requirement of a work of art is that it contain an *esthetic stimulus*.

(2) That the human response to esthetic stimulus is *emotion*. Not thought, but *feeling*. "Beauty," as we say, "*moves us*."

(3) That when, and *only when*, the esthetic content of a work of art rouses this emotional response in us, does it become art *to us*.

Which is why Mr. Moreau tells us to disregard the critics and sends us to the museums. For experience is more than "the best teacher." It is itself the raw material of understanding. After, but not before, the child has burned its finger at the grate, or its tongue at the soup bowl, you may "criticise" heat to it. And if you don't, it will criticise it for itself. Which is better. At any rate, all that the best art critic that ever lived can do for us, is to help us (out of his own developed and coordinated experience) intelligently to enlarge, and develop, and coordinate our own *art experience*. We won't go into the worst that the worst critics can do to us. It is

enough to point out that they occasionally persuade people to be ashamed of the esthetic emotions they *have* had, while inducing them to think they admire things toward which they have never, actually, lived at all.

It is no doubt safe to say that no human being is wholly immune to esthetic stimulus. But it is manifest that our respective susceptibilities in this regard range all the way from almost nil to what amounts to a controlling passion. And it is also manifest that the list of other stimuli to which, in our respective degrees, we are also variously susceptible, is as long as the list of our human engrossments.

It therefore becomes helpful to point out that there is no such thing as a work of pure art.

For every work of art, in addition to its essential and determinative content of esthetic stimulus, also contains other stimuli, not necessarily esthetic. For example, recognition stimuli to our memories, with their rousings of such personal likes, dislikes, sentiments and associations as result. Or, intellectual stimulations which, by suggestion, raise religious or moral issues on which we have strong feelings. And so on and so on. Even the reputation of the artist may be listed as a stimulus "not necessarily esthetic."

It follows, if we don't watch out, that we may find ourselves basing what we imagine to be artistic judgments on feelings that have nothing to do with the matter.

It is because it normally contains fewer of these esthetically extraneous stimuli than any other that music is called "the purest of the arts." Which is also why so few people go to hear music that is altogether beyond their esthetic comprehension. It offers them, so to put it, no side show attractions.

Artistic paintings, on the other hand, because of the normal nature of their subject matter (note that the *subject matter* of a painting may be, say, cows and a barn and trees, while its *subject* is an esthetic arrangement of these "properties") are pleasing as "pictures" to thousands who are never actually conscious of them as works of art at all, or to whom their esthetic stimulus is a mere "sauce" to their representational "goose." Indeed the all but universal extent of this obsession with the representational side of paintings, considered as works of art, is shown by the almost invariable question, that the first sight of a modern type of painting evokes.

Modern painting is striving, gropingly but earnestly, toward a nearer approach to the artistic purity of music, by discarding "cows and barns and trees" as subject matter and by appealing more directly to the esthetic emotions through abstract compositions in form and color. "But," says *almost* everyone who sees one of these paintings for the first time, "WHAT IS IT A PICTURE OF?"

It is not a picture of anything.

"But what, then, is it all about?"

It is an attempt to communicate emotion. And so, in their final esthetic analysis, are the Seventh Symphony, Whistler's "Portrait of My

Mother," the "Ode to a Skylark," the Venus de Milo.

And this brings me to the only critical comment, or amendment, that I have to offer on Mr. Moreau's letter. He says that "all schools of artists are trying by different methods to arrive at the same goal, that of harmoniously revealing to the untrained and unperceptive eye the great fundamental truths which nature so subtly conceals." I submit that if you substitute the word "scientists" for the word "artists" in this statement, it will be equally true. It will, indeed, be truer. For the revealing of truth while it may be the subject matter, is never the subject of esthetic endeavor.

I would prefer to say, "The essential—that is the purely artistic—goal of the artist, no matter what his school, or his medium, is the rousing in others of an esthetic emotion that has been roused in him by his contacts with life."

Every stimulus to which human beings are responsive is legitimate subject matter for the artist. But whereas the greatest artists of all times and in all mediums have so used and combined these not-of-themselves esthetic stimuli, that their assembled effect may be to enhance the esthetic stimulus they sought to communicate; lesser artists have but used beauty to focus our attention or increase our interest in the cows they painted or the stories they told.

And this line of demarcation, hazy as it may be and difficult to identify, is the actual and only boundary between all that may, loosely, be called art, and all that may, strictly, be called, "true art."

Incidentally, I hope I have made it clear that a good cartoonist may, at one and the same time, be both a very minor artist and a very useful citizen.

Sincerely,

J. B. KERFOOT.

"WHAT IS TRUE ART?"

To the Editor of *The Transcript*:

Dear Sir:—I beg to make public acknowledgment of my debt of gratitude to Mr. J. B. Kerfoot for the able way in which he amended and explained a statement of mine which I made thru *The Transcript* in reply to the editor's question, "What is true art?"

Realizing that I was addressing one who claimed to know nothing about art and that time and space were limited, I tried to speak in terms that a layman could grasp. Because the word "beauty" is so often taken by the layman to mean superficial appearances such as color tints of the skin or perhaps even color tints upon the skin, I selected the word "truth," believing that the reader would take it to mean that the artist would be striving to harmoniously reveal only esthetic truths or perhaps esthetic "vitamines," which impressed him and that he would leave the scientist to cold-bloodedly reveal other truths.

Mr. Kerfoot has much better called them "esthetic stimuli" which arouse in the artist

esthetic emotions. He said that "The essential—that is the purely artistic—goal of the artist * * * is the rousing in others of an esthetic emotion that has been roused in him by his contacts with life." Mr. Kerfoot clearly pointed out the difficulties that hinder the making of pure art, due to emotions other than esthetic. He says that some modern schools of painters are seeking to purify their art by ignoring all things or all subject properties such as cows, trees, barns, etc., and are striving by use of abstract compositions of color and form to express only pure esthetic emotion.

Here I beg to supplement Mr. Kerfoot's argument. It is upon this idea that we have also in process of development today the new art of color music, which will divide both time and space into abstract color and form composition.

Both within and without some of these ultra-modern schools of art, however, there is much misconception of their real significance and much argument as to their relation to other art of the past. Some denounce all art of the past. I pointed out that pure art could not be defined and Mr. Kerfoot further pointed out that there is no such thing as pure art. The artist is therefore not only groping to express things that are very abstract but is also feeling for ways of expressing them through means that are limited by subject properties (trees, cows, etc.) and is further limited by mediums (paint, clay, marble, etc.).

Because feeling enters so largely into the making of art we say that a work of art has feeling and arouses feeling or emotion in the observer. But as soon as the artist ceases feeling for expression and begins to define in detail, the element of finality enters the work and it ceases to be art and becomes a scientific or mechanical accomplishment. Rodin attempts to reveal with marble "The Hand of God" in the act of creating man but he does not attempt the use of detail. The work is therefore, so to speak, in an unfinished state. The artist is impelled by emotion but in order to make his work vital must make some progression and to do that must move orderly or with design and lead his observer to some point and then suggest to him the general direction beyond and allow him to proceed with only Imagination as his guide.

"How wonderful is that white ship
That leads me to the dawn,
And takes my troubled heart and cries,
'Sail on, and on, and on!'
Imagination is her name;
She never rests, but flies
Upon the creamy sea of dreams
Beyond God's bluest skies."

Artists as well as art are ever in the making and never finished. As Maeterlink points out "Love we bear Truth is more than Truth itself," so we might say striving toward or growth is greater than accomplishment or maturity.

But there is one thing, however, that some of the radical groups do not consider when they disregard the art of the past. That is that all

constructive progress is built upon the firm foundation of former experience and that following emancipated emotion alone, even tho it be esthetic, might lead to nowhere, unless a certain amount of reason which is of the higher intellect is allowed to exert some control. Religious revivalists frequently arouse emotions which are allowed to go unrestrained by reason sometimes until the convert is hurled into the chaos of insanity and superstition. The bird is moved by esthetic emotion but his song does not elevate his audience to the heights that Caruso does.

Birge Harrison tells the story of some art students in Paris who placed a canvas behind a donkey and then dipped his tail in different colored pots of paint. Each time they prodded him in the ribs thus arousing his emotions and to express them he switched his tail against the canvas. When the canvas was well covered they gave it a name and signed a fictitious signature and humbly submitted it at an Ultra-Modernist exhibition. The canvas was given a prominent place and also special mention for its supposed merits.

In contrast with that story I recall one time reading of the arrival of a great collection of paintings from Europe. Some of them were reproduced in the Sunday papers. I recall my feeling when I saw among them one of a grimy old woman deliberately paring her fingernail. However, I went to the Metropolitan Museum later to see them. I ascended the main stairway as I had many times previously in quiet conversation with a companion. When I reached the top I casually looked thru a doorway several feet at the right of me and as suddenly as tho I had received an electric shock I was spellbound. My heart jumped and my knees trembled. For the first time in my life in spite of all my early Calvinistic training, I was brought face to face with that phase of life which is eternal. Rembrandt had aroused in me that vivid emotion, thru the use of that homely—and by homely I mean home making, home loving, home abiding—old woman, that hung on the far side of the room, to be seen thru the doorway. In this old woman performing a most homely operation, Rembrandt had found life near the surface and not camouflaged beneath vanity, jewelry, facial adornments and palatial surroundings, as it would have been had he selected a society dame.

Which of these works approaches more nearly true art?

I hope that I have made clear that I do not condemn modern art endeavor as a whole, but only those that seek to destroy the firm foundations laid by past generations, like infants who would destroy their parental or guardian life before they are able to walk alone.

"What is true art?" Ruskin says: "To know a word is to know the spirit that coined the word."

Very cordially yours,

W. RHEA MOREAU.

Freehold, N. J., March 1, 1922.

A PERSONAL LETTER TO MR. MOREAU

Freehold, New Jersey.
March 10th, 1922.

DEAR MR. MOREAU:—

Who would have looked to see a discussion on the esthetic bases of art blossom forth in the Freehold press?

It happened that I knew nothing of your interest in these matters. Nor did I see the original editorial until, happening upon your letter and being delighted to find so interesting and clear-sighted a communication on such a subject in the local paper, I turned back to examine the "stimulus" that had called it forth.

My letter followed. And now comes your very generous and stimulating reply. And I take it that the printed series, should it be carried any further, would dive too deep for the *Transcript's* general public to follow.

Yet I am left, after reading your letter, with an active desire to add something to what has already been said. And so I am writing this.

As you have doubtless noticed, you have been writing wholly from the point of view of the creator of works of art; while I, naturally, have written from the viewpoint of the appreciator of them. Of course these two viewpoints are really complementary. But they frequently, when expressed, appear to be at cross-purposes. Perhaps a word or two as to how, as it seems to me, these two halves really work together to form the whole that we commonly call art, may make what I really wish to say more clear.

A work of art is, essentially, "an attempt at communication" between the artist and his fellow men. We are, I think, agreed that the thing attempted to be communicated is esthetic emotion. But, in effecting this sort of communication, just as in effecting any other sort, a mutually recognized CODE, more or less arbitrary and conventional, is required. Even when a man whistles for his dog, he is using a code agreed upon between them; and the significance of the arbitrary noise selected, in spite of its having been chosen expressly to suit the dog's aptitudes, has had to be taught the dog.

Now the two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional space on a canvas is also a code, the conventions of which have to be mutually accepted by artist and audience, and learned by both of them. A child has to LEARN to see a "Bow-wow" in the picture in his primer, just as much as the Bow-wow has to learn to recognize a summons in his master's whistle. And we (who have so thoroughly learned this code that we generally think it "reproduces" nature instead of merely "representing" it) have only to recall our first sight of a Japanese print and our amusement at its absurdities, to understand the truth that an alien art "jabbars" at us almost as unintelligently as does the speaker of an alien tongue.

A work of art, then, being an attempt at human communication, it follows that its COMPLETION implies an understanding audience. Just as "there is no sound without ears," so there is no art without an audience. But when we come to analyze the nature of the audience's response, we find that it differs, inevitably and fundamentally, from the detail of the artist's intended communication. The artist translates his felt emotion into the code. The receiving observer, more or less quickly, de-cyphers it. But not BACK into the actual terms of the artist's experience (of which he is for ever ignorant), but into terms of his own experience, temperament and mood.

This has all been explained for music in Robert Haven Schauffler's "The Creative Listener," and for literature in my own book, "How to Read." It is as literally true for painting and sculpture, the drama and the dance, as it is for words.

The CREATIVE effort of the artist and the RE-CREATIVE effort of the art lover, therefore, are, ideally, two halves of a whole. But in fact they never really meet or match. They simply "correspond" to each other more or less closely when circumstances are favorable; or result in a total blank, or in "miscarried messages," when circumstances so decree.

And circumstances ALWAYS so decree when one or more of the following factors are operative:

- (1) When new subject matter is being subdued to the uses of art in a field theretofore conventionally restricted.
- (2) When changes in emphasis (generally brought about by changes in non-esthetic human attitudes) are being introduced into composition.
- (3) When the code itself is being altered or enlarged to meet new demands for expression.

Thus it has come about that the same anathemas that, in my early days, were being hurled at Wagner, were hurled at Beethoven in his day, and are, in your time, being hurled at the musical radicals of the present. And in 1960 they will be hurled at the radical experimenters of that day, by critics who will be unable to understand how it was that we did not instantly discriminate between our one or two REAL composers and our forty eleven bob-tailed flushes; instead of tarring them all with the same brush of condemnation, or gilding them all with the same banana oil of enthusiasm.

WE CAN'T DO IT, very largely because, each according to his own abilities or disabilities, we are either busy groping our way to a balanced understanding of the three new factors mentioned above, or are angrily damning the whole threatened disarrangement of our already achieved adjustments to music as we know it.

And this brings me to the one criticism that I would like to make with regard to your last letter.

And, first, it seems to me that, having quoted a verse in praise of imagination, you have ignored, from then on, the actual nature of this human attribute. For imagination is, essentially, the ability to make new combinations of—or to sense new relationships between—elements of experience already known, but not usually associated. You can search the whole records of humanity and find no new thought or new thing “imagined” that was not compounded of elements already familiar to the mind. No “monster” not built up of animal parts; no “god” not a synthesis of human traits. And it is as futile to posit an “art movement” not sprung from the art development of the past as to posit a jump without a take-off.

Only, we must remember that every time an expander of past art achievement begins to subdue new material to his uses, to alter emphasis and add to code, the gist of what he is trying to do—difficult enough for us to grasp anyway, with our almost-belief that the old code and emphasis are a part of nature, and that the old subject matter is the sum of attainment—is further be-clouded for us by the followers-of-fashion who instantly begin to ape his eccentricities.

HE, as the world discovers a bit later, really HAD “imagination.” They—as the world also discovers before it proceeds to forget them—had nothing but imitativeness.

AND THERE IS BUT ONE WAY ON EARTH OF finding out the difference. And that is CONTINUED CONTACT WITH THE THINGS THEY BOTH PRODUCE.

Now the “modern art movement,” whatever it may or may not lead to—and however be-clouded its real meaning may be by its unexampled hordes of fashion-chasers and copy-cats—is, at its core, a manifest and even inevitable development of what has gone before.

Our civilization, as of course you know, “discovered” the esthetic, as compared to the utilitarian, values of “nature” in comparatively recent times. And painting, in both its realistic and its romantic phases, and as was proper and to be expected, immediately began to subdue this new material to the uses of art. When, in the 1870’s and 1880’s, Rood’s investigations into the physics of light and color placed a new tool in the hands of the painters, it was immediately seized upon by the then dominant realistic school and (with the attendant code changes of “pointilism” and other code isms) used to carry the representational side of the painting art to its (then) ultimate possible development.

But from the ultimate all roads lead backward. So there had to be a reaction.

And the reaction had to take the form of some sort of return to a previously indicated, but hitherto undeveloped aspect of the work of the past.

Cézanne now stands out as the pioneer-leader of this strategic retreat. And anyone who has had the pleasure of seeing one of El Greco’s few landscapes can now recognize the general character of the undeveloped lead that Cézanne set himself to enlarge. Reacting from the passionate preoccupation of his “impressionist” contemporaries with the surface appearances of the outer world, and supremely conscious of that outer world’s esthetic appeal, Cézanne was striving to DIVEST ITS REPRESENTATION IN PAINT OF ALL ESTHETIC NON-ESSENTIALS.

He was, of course, damned as crazy and worse. Thirty years ago few could “see” one of his pictures. Looking at one was something like looking at a page of a French book with only school Latin and Norman-English at our disposal. We recognized word-meanings. We missed the message. We saw that he was painting, say, a landscape. But we missed the emotion he sought to communicate. Indeed, for the most part, we KNEW NO SUCH EMOTION.

Yet Cézanne is already—because of his growing understanding by, and consequent appeal to, several art-loving generations—accepted as a great artist. Indeed, today, when we stand before one of his canvases, what PUZZLES us most is that he should once have puzzled us. Like the critics of 1960, we marvel at our former selves for not knowing him for what he was.

But, while Cézanne, his eyes fixed on the outer world, was making his splendid gesture toward a purer art; science had been pushing its inquiries into the mental world within us. And soon the most alert, the most responsive, the most adventurous of the new generation, began trying to subdue THIS new material to the uses of art.

But in order to do this, it was necessary to shift the emphasis from THE THINGS OUTSIDE US that rouse our esthetic emotions to the things that HAPPEN INSIDE US when these emotions are aroused. And in order to effect this shift, an ALTERED CODE—a code still in the making and that may, for all we know, never be perfected—had to be developed.

Now, how, as a matter of fact, did these subduers of new territory go about their task?

Did they break at once with the past? DID they refuse to build on its foundations? Did they “kill their mother” before they were weaned, or try to jump without a take-off?

On the contrary, they immediately set to work to ANALYZE INTO ITS ESTHETIC ELEMENTS THE REPRESENTATIONAL WORK OF THEIR PREDECESSORS.

No unbiased observer of any great quantity of the work of Picasso, for example, can fail to see that here is a man of very great intelligence, seeking, from every conceivable angle, the secret relationships between subject-matter, emphasis and code, on the one hand, and the artist-communicator and observer-receiver on the other.

Many of his experiments are utterly beyond my own ability to understand. Yet many of them still move me to strong esthetic response after a constant familiarity for ten or twelve years. Which, of course, is the only test available to the individual. But practically all of his experiments—and this

is why I name him—make it plain that he is, for some experimental reason or other, CUTTING UP WHAT WENT BEFORE TO FIND OUT WHAT IT DID TO US AND HOW IT DID IT. And if one is sensitive and exposes himself to enough examples, one will soon discover that Picasso is actually MAKING SOMETHING NEW, AND SOMETHING SOMEHOW MOVING, OUT OF THE PIECES.

Now all this, and all that has followed it, I tried to sum up for our ignorant and inquiring audience into a would-be explanatory sentence; intended, not to induce them to admire “modern art,” but to prod them into realizing that “a picture of something” is an INCIDENT and not the ART-ESSENCE of a painting.

If, incidentally, this sentence had induced some of them to go see for themselves what the radical art-endeavor of their own day was trying to do—well! I regret that you, who first told us to disregard the critics and to go to the things themselves, should have turned critic in order to dissuade them. For your final disclaimer of intending a blanket condemnation of “the whole movement” will never, in their minds, catch up with your choosing of that painting by an ass’s tail as your one cited example of “modern art” to place in juxtaposition with Rembrandt.

I would have preferred—and I believe that you, too, would have preferred, had you thought it over, to tell them again what you told them before:—

“Take nobody’s word for it. Go to the things themselves. Don’t ask questions about them. LET THEM DO WHAT THEY WERE MADE TO DO IF THEY CAN—THAT IS, MOVE YOU TO FEELING. Maybe, if you care about such things, you will discover for yourselves, what the future will inevitably find out, namely: what is wheat and what is chaff in our own day’s harvest of art.”

Sincerely,

J. B. KERFOOT.

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