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PLATES

HERBERT G. FRENCH.

I. Winged Victory.
II. Egyptian Princess.
III. Iris.
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ON BEAUTY

THINGS move to Power and Beauty; I say that much and I have said all that I can say.

But what is Beauty, you ask, and what will Power do? And here I reach my utmost point in the direction of what you are free to call the rhapsodical and the incomprehensible. I will not even attempt to define Beauty. I will not because I cannot. To me it is a final, quite indefinable thing. Either you understand it or you do not. Every true artist and many who are not artists know—they know there is something that shows suddenly—it may be in music, it may be in the sunlight on a glacier or shadow cast by a furnace or the scent of a flower; it may be in the person or act of some fellow-creature, but it is right, it is commanding, it is, to use theological language, the revelation of God.

To the mystery of Power and Beauty, out of the earth that mothered us, we move. I do not attempt to define Beauty nor even to distinguish it from Power. I do not think indeed that one can effectually distinguish these aspects of life. I do not know how far Beauty may not be simply fulness and clearness of sensation, a momentary unveiling of things hitherto seen but not dully and darkly. As I have already said there may be beauty in the feeling of beer in the throat, in the taste of cheese in the mouth, there may be beauty in the scent of earth, in the warmth of a body, in the sensation of waking from sleep. I use the word Beauty therefore in its widest possible sense, ranging far beyond the special beauties that art discovers and develops. Perhaps as we pass from death to life all things become beautiful. The utmost I can do in conveying what I mean by Beauty is to tell of things that I have perceived to be beautiful as beautifully as I can tell of them. It may be, as I suggest elsewhere, Beauty is a thing synthetic and not simple; it is a common effect produced by a great medley of causes, a larger aspect of harmony.

But the question of what Beauty is does not very greatly concern me, since I have known it when I met it and almost every day in life I seem to apprehend it more and to find it more sufficient and satisfying. It is light, I fall back upon that image, it is all things that light can be, beacon, elucidation, pleasure, comfort and consolation, promise, warning, the vision of reality.

H. G. WELLS.

(From "First and Last Things")
PAMELA COLMAN SMITH has seen through many veils. To her the universe is a congeries of suggestions. She has smitten with the rod of her imagination this adamant world of such seeming solids and vaporized it. And out of this vapor she has shaped her visions of life, her symbols done in color, her music matrixed and moulded to concrete shape.

No more curious and fascinating exhibition has ever been held in New York than the exhibition of her drawings at the Little Gallery of the Photo-Secession. She is a blender of visions, a mystic, a symbolist, one who transfigures the world she lives in by the overwhelming simplicity of her imagination. To me, these wonderful little drawings are not merely art; they are poems, ideas, life-values and cosmic values that have long gestated within the subconscious world of their creator—a wizard’s world of intoxicating evocations—here and now accouched on their vibrating, colored beds, to mystify and awe the mind of some few beholders; to project their souls from off this little Springboard of Time into the stupendous unbegotten thing we name the Infinite.

Here—as in “Warum”—Man stands questioning the Infinite, or again, as in “Closing Day,” a figure blasted with melancholia has dragged himself to the eaves of space, or as in “The White Castle”—a wonderfully executed piece of work—the eternal ascetic appears against the snowpeaks of spiritual isolation. What matter the subject? The artist here is saying the old immortal things in a new immortal way.

Nature is a veil which the imagination of man has woven to cover his nakedness. In the drawings of Miss Smith we are aware of standing before these veils which her poetic intuitions have invested with a supernal, intoxicating, hallucinating beauty. What secret lies athwart that “Elfin Music” with its vague, innominable beauty, a picture that would have ravished the soul of Keats or Shelley? And those giant moons mirroring the eternal Woman—does Isis uprear herself behind them? And in “Hushwood”—what overworld has she here prefigured and depicted with nightmare-touch?

So infinite suggestion stabs at us from out these canvases. They mean more than we see; they mean more than their creator is aware of. And everlasting mystery—Mystery with wistful face and ghostly footfall—wells out from all these conceptions and shrouds us with humility.

Wonder and mystery and dreams! And the Infinite with its gleaming veils of matter and the strange invasion of man in an alien universe! The minds of the greatest visionaries are infantile—and here Miss Smith approaches Blake and Beardsley. Only dullards believe in the commonplace; only mediocrity feels life to be stale. Forever sealed is he who does not marvel at his breath that comes and goes. Dead beyond all corpses are they who do not feel the mystery of light and shadow or the meadow with its blanket of snow. There is as much poetry in the world today as there ever was or ever
will be; we stand as near the sources of that outstreaming magic mist we call
the imagination as we ever did or ever shall; we are no wiser as to the cause or
the meaning of anything than we ever were or ever will be. And that seems
to me to be the metaphysic of Pamela Colman Smith, and into all her work
has passed her soul, drunk with the wonder and the mystery of things. For
wonder and mystery shall we poets put on as golden veils to cover our fleeting
souls.

I have spoken of the “overwhelming simplicity” of her work. They are
so simple that fat practical brains will either see in them nothing or lunacy.
All simplicity is akin to madness because it is nearer unity—it sees far and
deep and drinks directly from the founts of Mystery. The world is so com­
pletely and irretrievably lost in the concrete, it has so carefully moulded of
the secondary and incidental characteristics of creation a world within a world,
that a poet, such as Pamela Colman Smith, who speaks directly of things as
they are perceived by the mind not yet overlaid by the painted illusions of
sight and not affected by the deadly automatism of routine, is believed to have
a touch of insanity. All absolute simplicity startles, is eccentric and bears
about it the mark of other-worldness, when in reality it is merely the reserva­
tion of the virginal, first-day mind in the bogs of matter, the perception of
unity and fundamental things through the blinding fogs of this multiplied
absurdity called practical life. This spirit of artistic simplicity is the immortal
red bud that miraculously, age after age, in art, literature and philosophy,
bursts through the leaden strata of custom; the sword whetted with light that
cuts the thongs of familiarity that are twisted round and round the living,
palpitant soul of man.

Fat Mind standing before these wonderful offerings of Miss Smith
will let this ooze from his mouth: “There is no such world as I see here;
there are no such mountains, no such moons, no such flowers with baby heads
on them, no such ships, no such skies.” Thus, Fat Brain, who is legion.
In art, imagination is fact. What I see, that is my fact. “The world is my
idea”—in the great formula of Schopenhauer. My truth is the only truth;
MY world is the only world. That should be the great artist’s creed. The
world that Pamela Colman Smith has evoked is great just because it is her
world and no one else’s. The brain is the radiant hub of the universal illusion.
It is the brain that has exiled the stars in their infinities and imprisoned light
in air. Pole star and the frozen mountains of the moon are the mere flotsam
and jetsam of our highly elaborated imaginations. What I see and feel and
the way I see and feel—you shall sooner disperse the sun from its fires than
sunder me from my vision. And it is thus the individualist in art is born—
the eternal ghost fabricating its dreams. We can do nothing but duplicate
ourselves. Our images and dreams and thoughts are eggs. We enwomb
and unwomb ourselves. We have eternities, infinities, nadirs, zeniths boxed
in our brains. We are always delivering ourselves to ourselves. In so far
as we differ from others in that measure do we grow. Miss Smith’s drawings
are great because they are like no one else’s.
Also is Pamela Colman Smith the evocatrice of Wonder. Her world is a world of romance—a world seen with the divining and transforming spiritual power of a child. It is a fugacious world, a world forever tottering to its downfall, but saved from annihilation by its inherent power of recreating itself. The spirit that rules life is neither a spirit of destruction nor a spirit of creation. It is the Spirit of Evanescence, a lapsing of shadow into shadow, a fusing and interchanging, with a perpetual tendency to extinction. Inspired in many cases as Miss Smith has been by the pictures that music gives to her mind—music the art fugacious—she has seized these morsels of the infinite out of the hurrying stream of her dreams and translated them into colored vibrations. To such minds what is practical is vulgar, what is utilitarian is ugly. Grimm and Andersen tell finer truths than Euclid or Newton, and they that built the Pyramids built things less substantial than the two young gods who lie dead under the Aurelian wall.

For Art takes the infinite for its theme; life—practical life—has no theme; it is all variation, without a welding unity. It is detail, detail, detail, spread to stupefaction. The artistic spirit constructs ends; having attained them, it rests a marbled, immortal contemplation. It dwells in an everlasting Now and has power to hallow, smut and aureole the beast. Our visions! Who can take them from us? Our impassioned dreams that burst their brain-dikes and overflow on canvas or that torture from the marble block its secret of line and curve or that flash across the world as musical rhapsody—that is the real moment over against which the "real" workaday world is a fiction, a blasphemy, a lie. Pamela Colman Smith has in this manner, I think, challenged the world around her.

Let the scavengers scrape the gutters for coppers and duck in the cesspools of practical life for the rolling dollar. They are the "Captains of Industry"—the grimy, smutty captains of the marts, and their "industry" is a grimy, smutty, lurid hell of lies. And their realm is the realm of the arched spine and the furtive glance and the glutinous lip. They and all their works shall go in the winds; and the turrets and spires and bridges of our civilization shall long be gangrened in the muds of Oblivion when the dreamers from the slopes of Parnassus shall still with potent rod smite the souls of generations yet unborn; and from them, as from us, shall burst the fountains of exalted wonder.

Pamela Colman Smith has seen by closing the eyes.

Benjamin de Casseres.
UNTIL we can explain everything we can explain nothing—completely: but in analyzing one thing into the set of elements next back of it, we can sometimes do a little. Not much, because it is so hard to tell the difference between having something happen to you and telling what it was. Of course, in art, the practice of it is simply art, and the enjoyment of it is joy, but the understanding of it, or of anything else, is science. And the only method science knows is to first catch your rabbits, or facts, and then, when quite sure they are facts, to study them until you discover their law. And the facts to go after, in this case, are those of human senses and ideas the understanding of which is psychology. It is in psychology that art criticism which is other than personal opinion finds light.

Evolution shows that consciousness, whether of simple sensations, or of ideas made out of memories of sensations, depends upon the existence and character of its organ, the brain. Also it shows that this brain has, through unimaginable ages, been organized in agreement with the action of outside things upon it. Into the previously-existing hard world plastic life poured itself as into a matrix, so that now there is correspondence between man and this world. The more exact this is, the saner we are: the less exact, the less sane we are.

Of all the elements of consciousness that of space is deepest. It is so because the most fundamental thing in life is motion. And upon the sensation of motion is based the experience of space. And upon the experience of space is based the idea of form. Motion comes into life, in the struggle for existence, because it brings advantages denied to immobility. Nor is this all. In the competition, those creatures have a fateful advantage that move with least effort; because the struggle for existence is really but the struggle to economize. Waste is death; economy is life. And as deathward ways hurt and lifeward ways please,—why, this is just saying that costly acts pain and economical ones please.

This law governs all action. Whether mental or muscular, the most essential character of normal activity is economy. Orderly thinking is economy of mental effort. Seeing ordered elements of sight is economy of visual effort. In its higher degrees, this latter gives us the feeling of beauty. All the principles of design, which are but psychological laws, have here their root. Dancing, by its ordered movement, is the poetry, grace, beauty of motion; and this because of its economy. When we experience it we call it ease: when we observe it, we call it grace—when we trace in visible color the paths of graceful movements we have lines called beautiful. Guided by the mind, predisposed,—precompelled,—by its very structure, stored both beneath and above the threshold of consciousness with billions of memories of such economical movement, our eyes follow such lines with an easy familiarity which is delightful.
Yes, all our notions of space and of form, and the whole mental world woven out of these, all are based on these personal and ancestral memories of muscular sensations accompanying movement. Even of the eye this is true. For the forms that the eye tells us about it does not really see, it merely feels. If this surprises you, reflect that the eye gives the brain two quite different and utterly dissimilar sensations and by two quite different powers. An eye is a machine consisting of, first, a muscular system, and, second, a retina. The first deals solely with form: the second, solely with light. In dealing with form, the muscles move as attention is directed to different points in space. The relative positions of these points we get by the feeling of these muscle-movements. The determination of form by the eye is, therefore, true muscle-reading and not vision at all. Other muscles than those of the eye, as, those of the hand, also deal with form. Thus a blind man knows form but never light.

Again: the muscle-reading powers of the eye are two-fold, corresponding to the perception of, first, depth in space, and, second, vertical and lateral extension. The muscles dealing with depth control the focus of the lens and the convergence of the axes of the eyeballs: those dealing with vertical and lateral extension control the rolling of the eyeball so that the pupil may follow lines and thus muscle-read them to consciousness. In art, sculpture appeals to all the muscles of the eye, but painting almost solely to those that roll the eyeball.

Painting, existing in but two dimensions, cannot give us the sensations that come with focussing our eyes at different depths. It cannot, therefore, really represent solids. By graded light it may, indeed, suggest a certain modelling, but the form thus suggested is purely an inference, not a perception. We do not have the sensation we get from solids themselves. With forms in two dimensions, however, the case is very different. Here we have the actual sensation. In a way, in fact, this sensation is clearer than that which we get from nature. And this clearness comes from having everything in one plane so that we more easily see and compare visual forms than we can in nature. For out there, objects are at various distances and must, therefore, be seen one at a time as we successively get a focus on them.

Furthermore, observe that in the real world the focussing muscles and the rolling muscles, dealing respectively with depthness and with flatness,—these work exactly together, sending to the brain two sensations that make but one conscious impression. But if, now, one of these two habitually paired sensations be taken away, as in painting it is, all our attention goes to the one that is left. So that in this way, by simply omitting the thickness and presenting the flatness all by itself, we throw a tremendous emphasis upon it. We create a world in the flat, a world in which lines, silhouettes, patterns, and very likely lights and colors also, are better and more pleasantly seen, because less confusedly seen, than in nature herself. And so, no matter how few find it out, the ultimate fact remains that the essentials of perfect painting are two-dimensional form and light. For this is all that it is possible, in this art, to
present with perfection. Until they are told not to do so everybody draws
and paints in this way. It is the natural way.

Now I am not under the illusion that I have explained why beautiful
form is beautiful; but possibly I have pointed my finger at the spot where some
better explainer might hopefully dig. While I, meantime, go on to suggest
a clue to the origin of those perceptions through which we receive feelings of
the beauty of light and color. We know that light has two sole variations,
which are, in quantity, which is values, and in quality, which is colors. And
the only orders possible in this raw material are quantitative and qualitative
progressions. Which is to say, gradations of light and of color. The opposi­
tion of complimetaries intensifies. Call it a color scale of the greatest range
in the fewest steps. Insert even one intermediate step and you add to its beauty.
Put in half a dozen intervals and you clear up the perception of a gradation
or progression. And again you have increased its beauty. All color-art shows
this principle.

But now just whence came that particular piece of our brains by which
we so keenly and agreeably discern variations in light? How and why did
we evolve it? It might do in Ruskin’s day to dogmatize about the beauty of
gradations being due to the “idea of infinity,” but we poor moderns are not
allowed to explain the known in terms of the unknown. We must speak of
human experience. And what has been our experience with vision in the past
few million years? This, the main business of vision has been to contribute
to our knowledge of the forms of things by seeing the differences in the light
on their surfaces. In most forms the differences form a scale, a gradation,
a progression, an orderly arrangement. The more exactly the eye reads this
gradation, the more the mind detects “differences in spite of resemblances,” —
the more information it gets about the form. We may say, therefore, that the
light-reading power of the eye has grown by our age-long training in trying to
determine the forms of untouchable things, by reading the light-scales of their
surfaces. Our eyes have in this way come to have an inherited habit of expec­
tancy. They expect light to be graded, and deal with it easier and more
gratefully when it is so. They prefer to have light act in its expected, its
familiar, its typical, manner.

It all amounts to about this, in the end, that beauty is a recognition of the
universal ways of things in general. It is our direct, instant, sensuous
recognition—without cogitation at all—that this world is our world, and that
it has been made infinitely familiar in a million former incarnations. We know
we are at home. And it comforts us. In times of grief I find the beauty of
nature and the beauty of art to be a solace. Whatever goes, this remains.
“I require of all pictures,” says Emerson, “not that they astonish me but that
they domesticate me.” And they will not unless they are lovely, and men are
wiser than they know when they flee the ugly and embrace the beautiful.

Bolton Coit Brown.
AMERICAN INDIFFERENCE

In artistic matters, the crime of the American is indifference. Squat on her haunches, sucking at the dripping dugs of the Golden Calf, Columbia would use a Monet or a Whistler for a seat—if they were not worth gold. Stupidity and Vulgarity, thy name is America!

The rare, the strange, the beautiful, the new—whether in art or literature—is taboo to the American mind. No word exalts the American mind like the word Respectability. It is its shibboleth. Poe was its most famous victim.

The average American passes dumbly, hat in hand, before the Accepted Names as though he had entered a fane dedicated to Mammon. In the paradise of cowards, he is the tetrarch.

On the waxed and shining ramparts of this Eden of Indifference struts Conformity dressed like a flunky. Behind him shambles the lackey Hypocrisy, muffled in gold-leaf. From beyond the walls, from deep within this laboratory of the vulgar, the stupid, the mediocre, the bourgeois, is blown a sickening odor. It comes from those millions upon millions of beings whose souls are without drainage.

This giant conspiracy of mediocrity, this race-thesaurus of the average, has in all ages been the sworn enemy of all that is new, radical, anti-academic, in art. Artistic respectability is the crime of the American. In the sphere of morals this spirit invents anti-vice societies to protect its own mind against its own pornographic instincts. In the sphere of art it shuns genius like a plague. It has never given the world a brave act, a big thought, a beautiful idea, a great poem, a great picture, a great book. Food and sex—they are the axes on which indifference and respectability turn; for it, life is only significant below the navel.

In this country it is impossible to compute the number of artistic geniuses that have been chloroformed in the House of Indifference. Bribed, beaten, threatened, crushed under debt and poverty, the spark of artistic and mental revolt has been extinguished in these minds; and so they have continued to exist in this House of the Great Garlic Stench and have died with the chaplet of the ordained virtues on their brows, pews paid up to date, the coffin neatly beflowered by opera subscribers.

At birth, handed iron lances to fling at the sun, they have come to cut them into darning needles and book-cutters. Foundlings of ideas, pregnant with dreams, they farmed themselves out to Rote, their dreams paling to ashy fears. Their hands outstretched toward the open seas of the Strange, the Beautiful, the Unknown, they have felt in their muscles the palsy of willingness before the giant icy hand of Indifference or the croonings of senile Respectability. The fine purple coat of artistic and moral rebellion has become a seedy house jacket and the sandals of fire are exchanged for carpet slippers that convoy one noiselessly over the plush conventions.
And behold the wealthy American patrons of the arts! Ring Olympus with thy laughter! They carry their exhausted souls to Europe and buy "art objects," the great money value of which is the only thing they were made to appreciate. While the American artist who has an original note, who has seceded in order to preserve the inviolability of his own artistic genius, rots in his rags in his hole of a studio. These "patrons" (or should we call them padrones?) ransack museums, purchase old palaces, bragging with the brazenness of all vulgarity of the enormous prices they paid for them. They are the Medusas of Indifference, the exposed guts of Respectability.

What can these Medusas of Indifference know of the eternal renascence in art of the rebel? The epiphany of a Rodin—it is, in truth, the instinct to live. The rebel is the eternal knocker at the door of the House of Indifference, the Voice that calls in all centuries to the pursuit of the Intangible. Revolt is the cloven flame that consumes age after age the citadels of authority and their dull commanders sheathed cap-a-pie in their ethical petticoats.

In the United States it is the hardest thing in the world to preserve your artistic individuality. The Horla of Indifference will absorb you at last. Threatening missives are borne to you upon every wind and the hint of penalties falls on your ears from the moment you pronounce that word sacred to all genius—¹. You will have visions of the bread line. Fear—the obscene bird—circles over your soul like a kite amorous of carrion. The cabals of Indifference and Respectability are always in session; and your inspiration begins to flutter like a candle in its fetid breath. The insinuative imps of temptation swarm in and out of your clay. Bread line or automobile? You must decide. You are in the United States. You will, if you are not of the Viking strain, end a mush of concessions.

Benjamin de Casseres.

FROM EDITH TO HER FRIEND IN WACO, TEX.

DEAR HELEN: All New York's gone crazy over Sorolla. No, my dear, he isn't a pianist or a tenor, he's a painter. Isn't it funny? Fancy a furor over a painter! And in New York of all places, where so many really important people turn up during the season! Imagine my surprise, when my lady Boss ordered her chauffeur to drive to 156th Street—the Hispanic Museum! What's that? I asked. She didn't exactly know; but some fad, she understood, of that dear eccentric Archie Huntington. The visit, she explained, was a nuisance: but a necessity. Only yesterday thirty-four women at the Colonial Club had asked her if she'd been to Sorolla's. She had to go, to get immune. So, on the way, instead of dictating her morning correspondence, she made me read her a notice of the exhibition in the "N. Y. Shiner." Art bores the dear old
lady to extinction, but she dotes on that dear, funny Mr. Bluenecker; calls him a sweet, wicked, saucy, delightful cynic. Accordingly, I read her a column of his clever gush in which it was suggested that New York now could shake itself free of the fetid atmosphere of Salome—which, by the way, Mr. Bluenecker had previously extolled as a “green dream of crimson soul-disease, lurid with the calcium of decaying conscience”—and emerge into God’s clean sunshine, as it basks on the elastic nudity of sinless children—an orgy of pure animalism, a debauch of purity, and so on.

Would you believe it, when we reached the museum, the adjacent streets were alive with autos? You would have thought all Society was there; and most of it was. The galleries were packed with the very best people. It was as smart a mob as at the Horse Show; only no room to move about, and the hats made it impossible to see the pictures. But nobody cared about them; any more than about the horses at the other show. On the drive home, my lady Boss remarked: “A regular circus, my dear. Every year Society gets less and less particular.”

Well, it seems all the critics had gone crazy over the show, and then the Society reporters wrote columns of stuff about the smart people and their clothes—“Society and Fashion at Sorolla’s”—“Sorolla taken up by Society”—“Fashion’s Latest Fad, Sorolla.” Then the people who don’t count—like poor me and you—began to flock. We needed a new rallying cry. “Meet me at the Fountain” was out of date. “Meet me at Sorolla’s” became all the go. Jams of people! But fortunately Jack is clever in a crowd. By the way, this show has turned the jolly, easy-going Jack into an acid drop. He’s been consorting with some of those hairy savages at the “Playmate’s Club,” who call themselves artists and foam at the mouth because of Sorolla’s success. “Damned foreigner”—“dam-fool public”—with such horrid oaths does Jack disfigure his pretty lips.

At the exhibition he positively snorted. Vowed it was lighted like the side-shows of a circus, but all the freaks were loose on the floor; creatures who knew no more about art than aeroplanes; just lifted off their base—legs was his word—by the novelty of what had been puffed by advertising, socially patronized, and presented with such an abundance of ditto repeated, that the fool people couldn’t escape being hit, and are up in the air with surprise at discovering for the first time that a picture may have some meaning for them.

But Jack’s sour. As a matter of fact, some very intelligent persons admired the show; even some of the professors at Columbia University; parsons too, and settlement-workers! Letters appeared in the papers from people, whom it had “helped” and “uplifted.” Three ladies wrote sonnets to Sorolla; and that darling Dr. Smiler, who has just started what Jack calls a “Grin Club,” preached a sermon on “Sunshine Embodied; Smiles Made Flesh; Optimism in Paint.” He said Sorolla was the greatest preacher of the Gospel of Grin since Democritus. To all of which and much more Jack says h--; no, it’s an extra naughty word, and I won’t write it.

With much smiles, yours optimistically, Edith.
PHOTO-SECESSION NOTES

ETCHINGS BY ALLEN LEWIS

For two weeks, beginning February twenty-sixth, the walls of the Little Gallery were occupied by etchings and book-plates, the work of Allen Lewis, a young American artist who now lives in New York after having spent seven years in Paris. In this age of superficiality and scepticism, where the chief interest of artists is to record the mere externals of life; where graceful lines and pleasing spotting are sufficient aims in themselves, it is singularly refreshing to come across the work of a man who seems to have kept himself untouched by the modern spirit of indifference to the philosophy of life; and who combines a remarkable feeling for composition with a seriousness of purpose and a simple faith reminiscent of the spirit of the old German masters.

A feature of the Lewis exhibition was the special catalogue which the artist designed and printed.

DRAWINGS BY PAMELA COLMAN SMITH

The opening of Miss Smith’s exhibition of drawings in monochrome and color was marked by an entertainment offered to her Secessionistic friends at 291 Fifth Avenue on the evening of March sixteenth. Those who attended were delighted by her recital of West Indian nursery tales and her chanting of ballads by the Irish poet, Yeats. Her new work, visions evoked by music, sketched during the concert or opera, testifies to the inexhaustible resources of her imagination and her untiring productiveness. This exhibition is more fully dealt with by Mr. de Casseres elsewhere in this number of Camera Work.

SKETCHES IN OIL BY MAURER AND WATER-COLORS BY MARIN

The work of two Americans now living in Paris is on view at the Little Gallery at the present writing. John Marin’s water-colors have been pro-
nounced by authorities the best examples of the medium which have ever 
been shown in New York. Alfred Maurer’s sketches in oil are strong evidence 
of the seduction of Matisse and the “fauve” school. His new point of view 
is so radically different from that of the academic painters, and so unfamiliar 
to them and to the New York public that many are much puzzled and bewild­
ered on first sight. These sketches have been the cause of many heated dis­
cussions; but the fact that many who ridiculed them at the outset have 
noticeably weakened in their attitude on more intimate acquaintance is fair 
evidence that there is something worth looking into in the new tendencies. 
With all who saw them, whether they acted as an irritant or brought forth 
praise and admiration, they at least acted as a stimulant. For that alone we 
should be thankful, as the American art world today is in sore need of being 
awakened from its lethargy.

Elsewhere in this number of Camera Work are reprinted certain data 
which refer to this exhibition.

The abundance of material shown during the season which is drawing 
to a close—the Steichen Rodin’s “Balzac” series of photographs and the F. W. 
Hunter Japanese prints being the two remaining exhibitions—has not allowed 
any show to occupy the walls for more than two weeks. This, since in busy 
New York it takes time for the public to become informed of what is going 
on, has proven altogether inadequate and many have come to the Little Gallery 
only to find the show they wanted to see replaced by a new one. Next season, 
therefore, it is planned to keep no show open for less than three weeks. Thus 
those who are interested in the new work which the Secession deems worthy of 
being brought to the attention of the New York public will be given an 
adequate opportunity to view it.

NEW MEMBERS

The following have been enrolled as Associates in the Photo-Secession: 
Miss Pamela Colman Smith, of New York and London; Mr. D. Putnam 
Brinley, of New York; Mr. Marius de Zayas, of New York and Spain.

Paul B. Haviland.
THE DE MEYER AND COBURN EXHIBITIONS

NEW YORKERS have had two opportunities this season of becoming better acquainted with the photographic work of Baron A. de Meyer. A group of still-life prints, owned by Mrs. Gertrude Käsebier, was seen in the International Exhibition of Photographs held in the National Arts Club, while in a one-man show in the Photo-Secession Gallery he was represented by portrait and figure subjects, as well as by still-life, both in black and white and in color.

It is the last-named that particularly delighted me. These arrangements of flowers, fruit and glassware heightened one's appreciation of the possibilities of photography, in the direction especially of rendering the complexities and subtleties of light values. For my own part, I had never before seen photographic prints of so deliberate and convincing an exquisiteness of refinement. On the other hand, where this delicacy of intention and technique has been bestowed on portrait and figure subjects, the evidence of deliberateness and excessive refining interferes, to my thinking, with the sense of spontaneity and suggests that the varieties of nature have been sacrificed to an artificial perfection of planes and values.

In the still-life, however, there is no challenge to one's sense of facts. The artist, I take it, has no purpose of representation. He is not even intent on interpreting the sentiment of flowers and fruit. In de Meyer's grapes, for example, there is no suggestion of the lust of the soil; you could crush from them no heat of wine. On the contrary, it is with their possibilities of decorative arrangement that he is chiefly concerned, and particularly with their surfaces, as offering a complex system of facets for the reflection of the infinite nuances of light. He is bent, in fact, on translating his material into a fantasy of abstract beauty. It is almost a rendition of matter into music, wherein the notes are values and their relations and combinations form the harmonies. And to this problem, which is a blend of the mathematical and artistic, he brings, on the one hand, an analysis of vision, scientific in its acuteness and precision, and, on the other, a sensitiveness of feeling and a conscientiousness and skill of craftsmanship that are extraordinary. Compared with these prints, which have the delicate perfection of some choice example of Japanese lacquer-work, too many other photographs seem technically inefficient.

A similar conscientiousness distinguishes his color-plates. They exhibit the same deliberate searching effort to extract from the medium its ultimate possibilities; the same skill and eagerness for perfection in the handling of the processes. Their charm, which to an unusual degree impressed everyone—laymen and artists alike—with whom I discussed them, is primarily due to de Meyer's sense of color arrangement, but finally and most emphatically to his being possessed with the scientific as well as the artistic temperament.
These still-life prints, in fact, are beautiful and instructive examples not only of the merit of technical thoroughness, but also of the need of its being established on a scientific comprehension of the photographic medium.

In Coburn’s case also, a one-man show at the Photo-Secession Gallery and a panel at the National Arts Club have exhibited some of his latest work. My first impression was that he had made a big step forward. Longer study and reflection confirmed the advance, but detracted somewhat from its bigness. For what had first impressed me was the stirring variety of the prints, their evidence of a wide and alert vision, and of a freshness of capacity for seeing pictures in unexpected directions. But the value of this impression became to some extent discounted, as one realized that the subjects were drawn from several different parts of the world. Coburn has had the advantage of being able to travel widely; and it was the novelty and variety of the actual scenes depicted that in some measure accounted for the apparent freshness of vision. By comparison with a good deal in New York picture shows that is humdrum, his prints had the smack of new subjects. Were they also newly seen? Yes; this is one of the points that counts toward the continuance of the first impression. Coburn unquestionably, I think, has an originality of vision. He sees things for himself and with a truly picture-making eye; and, another point to the good, his faculty of selection is growing in elasticity and comprehension. There is in these later pictures evidence of a suppler and completer use of the possibilities of composition; moreover, of a sounder use. He is less attracted than formerly by the obvious features of the scene, by the rhetoric of excessive display and the easy emphasis of striking contrasts. He is learning to see the subject as a unit and to correlate its several parts to the whole. For example, to judge by these prints, he is no longer disposed to sacrifice the middle distance to a bold silhouette of foreground against a faint distance. He is studying more closely and rendering more truthfully the several relations of the whole environment.

This, when he allows himself to be seen at his best, means that the technical qualities are more logically and sympathetically developed—a third point that counts toward a permanent impression of his progress. On the other hand, I think it must be admitted that this technical excellence is not characteristic of his work as a whole. Among the examples shown there were many in which the possibilities of the medium had been sacrificed to a too easy acceptance of something less than the best attainable, and it was the gathering consciousness of this fact that made one doubt the bigness of his advance. Coburn started out with Peer Gynt’s ideal, “Be thyself”\(^5\); he cannot afford to drop to the Trolls’ level, “To thyself be—enough.”

Charles H. Caffin.
PLATES

CLARENCE H. WHITE and ALFRED STIEGLITZ.

I. Experiment 27.
II. Experiment 28.
III. Miss Mabel C.
IV. Torso.
THE MAURERS AND MARINS AT THE PHOTO-SECESSION GALLERY

No exhibition ever held under the auspices of the Photo-Secession aroused more interest or discussion amongst the art-lovers and artists of New York than the recent Maurer sketches in oil and Marin water-colors exhibited in the Little Gallery from March thirtieth to April nineteenth. As a matter of record we reprint the leaflet which appeared with the Catalogue and which was written by Mr. Charles H. Caffin for the occasion. For the same reason we reprint some of the press clippings.

ALFRED MAURER

Is Saul also among the prophets? was the query suggested by Alfred Maurer’s picture in last year’s Salon. For it represented a life sized figure, supporting a color scheme of geranium red and two blues of similarly arresting hue. Could this be the work of a man hitherto associated with low tonalities; which had been duly honored in America, where the safe thing always counts, with prizes and medals. Alas, it was true! Poor Maurer had left the sure path and was consorting with the prophets, the crazy seers—those who see. The quondam pupil of Mr. Chase had had his eyes opened by Matisse. He had been led to discover other colors in his paint box than blacks and drabs and white; also to look for color beyond the walls of an artificially darkened studio. He had been drawn out-of-doors into the sunshine. There, under the indirect persuasion of Matisse, he has found himself seeing, not only local color, but visions of color, evoked from the actual facts, by the play of his imagination under the spell of some particular mood. He has ranged himself, in fact, with the other men in Paris, who, as I have tried to suggest in the case of Marin, are trying in their pictures to substitute interpretation for representation, and whose interpretation eliminates as far as possible the assertion of the concrete, seeking an abstract expression through color harmonies, somewhat as does the musical composer.

In these studies then, for that is what they are—color notes of spiritual impressions received in the presence of nature, he is not aiming at the representation of the landscape, but at the projection on the panel of the color harmonies with which for the moment nature has inspired him. They are primarily to be judged as little creations of color beauty, with the same detachment from notions of subject matter, that you approach the appreciation of a piece of antique pottery. You may even observe in some of them—I don’t know how intentionally on Maurer’s part—a dripping application of the color, and the leaving of portions of the ground apparent between the masses of color, that recall the antique potter’s method of applying colors and leaving parts of the biscuit of the vase in reserve. In judging them this way, however, one may be conscious sometimes that an object has been so emphasized as to challenge the mind to a question of what it represents, without giving sufficient clue to the answer. A doubt is raised. One is puzzled, and thus the mental operation of conjecture interferes with the free play of the imagination.

But the occasional occurrence of these concrete disturbances to the purely abstract impression may serve by contrast to bring out more clearly at what this artist and others, working in the same spirit, are aiming. They would borrow from nature only so much form as may supply a scaffold on which to hang the decoration of a color fantasy. When once we have accepted this point of view, we cease to attach separate importance to the scaffold, and only ask, in return that the artist will not obtrude it on our notice. If he does, it is at his own peril of disturbing our appreciation of his abstract purpose. The latter, for my own part, seems a natural evolution from the example of Whistler and marks a new and very suggestive note in modern painting. It is the more to be respected, that it is in the nature of treasure trove, recovered from a redoubtable past; for it is, along the line that Whistler blazed, a reinforcement of our own art by infusing into it some of the principles of the antique art of the Orient.

CHARLES H. CAFFIN.
JOHN MARIN

John Marin is one of the younger Americans in Paris, who are more intent on self-expression than on pursuing the well-trodden path which leads to official honors. He is a part of that fermentation which, started by Cézanne and stirred by Matisse, has given new impulse to the artist's old recipe of seeing the world for himself. It is the latest product of the influence that oriental art began to have upon the accidental in the sixties; briefly stated, a more abstract way of receiving and of rendering the impression of the scene. It is not so much a visual as a spiritual impression, eliminating as far as possible the consciousness of the concrete; the rendering in consequence being not a representation of the original but an interpretation. Shall we describe it as the principle of a Whistler nocturne, extended to include all kinds of daylight?

The water-colors of this exhibition vary in the degree to which they suggest the actuality of the scene. In some the impression of locality and of enlivening figures is vivid; in more, however, the consciousness of facts disappears in a spiritualized vision of form and color, that I can best explain to myself by the way in which a composer will expand a motif into an elaborated harmony. But in whichever way the motif of the locality is treated—whether rather directly or by interpretation—there is a creativeness displayed in the color scheme. The ordinary eye would look in vain for these color harmonies in the actual scene, but will recognize both their truth and their extraordinary fascination in these imagined visions. For the most part they are harmonies of indescribably delicate tonalities; wrought on the Japanese principle of the Notan, a balance of dark and light, of the intimate relationship of contrasted values. Though subtle in the ensemble, they are constructed vigorously, in free, broad washes of color, applied with an admirable directness that seldom misses or overpasses the impression which is sought to be conveyed. There are, it is true, occasional instances, for example, in some of the skies, where the tact of omission might better have been employed, but for the most part this fine instinct of feeling what to leave out is a notable characteristic of these pictures.

Marin also works in oils, pastel and etching. In the first, while there is evidence of the same independent vision and beautiful sense of color, he had not, when I saw his work last summer, as yet found himself so decisively as in his water-colors. His etchings of Venice, Amsterdam and Paris, excellent as they are, show less independence of vision, being somewhat reminiscent of Whistler; but the pastels, delicate morsels of suggestiveness, once more reveal not only Marin's refined imagination, but also his essential individuality. He was born at Rutherford, New Jersey, in 1875.

Mr. James Huneker in the Sun, April 7, 1909 writes:

At the Photo-Secession Gallery, 291 Fifth avenue, Alfred Maurer, a whilom Chase pupil, is showing fifteen sketches in oil. A profound peace will overspread the exacerbated souls of them that display threatening grinders when the names of Sorolla and Zuloaga are mentioned. Here is this young Maurer, who went abroad in full possession apparently of his color sense, suddenly become a chromatic fantasy. The catalogue notes that the influence of Henri Matisse shows itself in these extraordinary efforts. Matisse, yes, and also Gauguin, whose strained symbolism has evidently affected the ambitions of the American. He is after something, that is certain, but whether it is a Catharine wheel at full tilt on a Fourth of July night or an ordinary apoplectic aura we can't say. We know that Prendergast of Boston can succeed in making clear his vision while working in the same bloodshot optical region. Perhaps Maurer will some day. It is a cruel Eastern garden of writhing arabesques that he puts before us. And yet—but let us wait; such attacks pass. Besides, this chap has talent as well as boldness. John Marin, another American in Paris, has twenty-five water-colors in the same gallery, delicious in tonalities, subtly evocative. There is the poet in this young man; he has a creative touch. He displaces the line to achieve movement; often his cityscapes are mere wraiths. A harmonist in an attenuated scale, a symbolist, above all else. While Maurer could be called "The Knight of the Burning Pestle," Marin is the master of mists. He can give you the disembodied soul of Paris. We recall both Claude Debussy and the prose poet Francis Poirtevin when looking at his studies. Altogether an interesting duet in fire and shadow, this little exhibition.
Mr. J. F. Chamberlin writes in the *Evening Mail*, April 3, 1909:

Mr. Stieglitz, the mighty hunter of the Photo-Secession, has captured another "wild man." His name is Alfred Maurer. He is an American, and a young man. He has been painting more or less conventionally, and successfully—that is to say, he has been selling his pictures. And now he has turned away from everything and gone into something that he thinks is more real, more vital—and he is painting pictures that are so extreme, so phenomenal, so miraculous, that they could not be given away.

This proves, apparently, that Mr. Maurer is sincere, and not engaged in an attempt to scare the world into noticing him. At any rate, he is endeavoring to express something that is in him, and therefore is entitled to respect.

But his pictures! There is no understanding them. Two or three, indeed, possess strong indications of an intense feeling for the beauty of dazzling light, and for big, splendid forms in nature. But here is one which has in the foreground a great gob of color; what is it? A bursted tomato? A fireman's hat? A red rock? A couple of people under an umbrella? Nobody can make out. And yet one can guess any of these things. But over there is another which cannot even be guessed at.

It can only be said that Maurer sees Matisse, and goes him several better. Mr. Caffin intimates that he is a "concrete disturbance." He is a disturbance all right, but wherein is he concrete?

As to the water-colors of John Marin, another young American, which are exhibited in the same gallery with Maurer, the case is quite different. It is a fair prediction that some time these broad yet delicate things, in which there is the spirit of Whistler and a color that is pure, original, vivacious and subtle, will be famous.

Mr. Arthur Hoeber, recently elected National Academician, writes in the *Globe*, April 6, 1909:

One is more or less certain to find the last thing in art at the little galleries of the Photo-Secession, 291 Fifth avenue, and, sure enough, this time it is the last—with a vengeance. If one might hope it really was the last—of this sort—there would be some consolation! The erstwhile promising, even performing, Alfred Maurer, onetime pupil of Chase, is now in Paris, where the bacillus of the Matisse craze has entered into his soul and, what is much worse, into his canvases. He has capitulated, horse, foot, and dragons. One may see the fell nature of the disease as manifest in the fifteen sketches he shows. Frankly, of all the pure forms of imbecility that have overtaken youth time out of mind, these are the limit. Obviously, Mr. Stieglitz, fearful that his sanity might be questioned, has caused to be printed a sort of foreword from the pen of Charles H. Caffin, which he has enclosed along with his notice of the display. The writer performs some rhetorical gymnastics and delivers himself of this oracular statement, that Maurer, "under the indirect persuasion of Matisse, has found himself seeing, not only local color, but visions of color, evoked from the actual facts, by the play of imagination under the spell of some particular mood. He has ranged himself, in fact, with the other men in Paris who are trying, in their pictures, to substitute interpretation for representation, and whose interpretation eliminates as far as possible the assertion of the concrete, seeking an abstract expression through color harmonies, somewhat as does the musical composer."

After digesting this carefully, we further learn from Mr. Caffin's illuminating exposition that "in these studies—color notes of spiritual impressions received in the presence of nature—Maurer is not aiming at the representation of the landscape, but the projection on the panel of the color harmonies with which for the moment nature has inspired him." It will be admitted without the slightest argument that there is never a suspicion of the man having aimed at representing nature, as it will be generally insisted that if these be harmonies the world's conception of harmony has hitherto been all wrong. The game in these Maurer sketches
is to find the harmony as it is universally under­
stood. Even Mr. Caffin, however, seems to
have been a little staggered by these departures.
He frankly confesses that the “dripping applica­
tion of the color” may or may not have been
intentional on Mr. Maurer’s part. We go
further and confess our utter ignorance as to
what is meant at all by “a dripping application
of color,” and we are not entirely unfamiliar
with technical processes in the matter of paint­
ing. “Mr. Maurer,” further says the author
of the preface, “has been led to discover other
colors in his paint box than blacks, and drabs,
and whites.” But then one does not have to be
a prophet, nor even the son of a prophet, to get
that far.

Even in the dear dead days beyond recall,
Mr. Maurer occasionally made us aware that
other pigments existed. Now, however, he
blazes away with a whole battery of pure pig­
ment, painting tree trunks bright vermilion,
and other things with equally inappropriate
tones, such as never were on land or sea, and
with an idiotic jumbling of forms would make
us believe the new vision causes him thus to
see, or feel, or appreciate, or whatever terms
he chooses to apply, nature. In the name of the
prophet—figs! To take this seriously is to
write oneself down an ass. There is no health,
sanity, intelligence, beauty or harmony in the
performances, and they are not worth the space
we have already given them. It is to laugh!
But the mirth is mingled with pity, regret,
disappointment, at the blind subjugation of an
ordinarily intelligent mind to so foolish and
transient a fad. Imitation at best is always to
be deplored; but when one so entirely barters
one’s individuality, the gods themselves weep
at the act. Mr. Maurer had much better come
home. He is pursuing a will o’ the wisp,
maybe some beckoning sea siren. He’d best
beware, for she will drag him down into water
which, beneath the smooth exterior, reeks of
pollution and will bear no analysis.

Mr. Harrington writes in the N. Y. Herald, April 5, 1909:

Those who wish to have a shock from colors
will find it in the galleries of the Photo-Secession,
where fifteen oil sketches by Mr. Alfred Maurer
blaze out of the pale green-gray burlap on the
walls. Mr. Maurer once painted in a delicate
tonal way and had a soul of mauve and gray.
Now he screams in primary colors. The
sketches seem to buzz, and one of them suggests
a yellow hornet escaping from purple flypaper.
All form seems to be lost in straining for light
that almost blinds and for color that cries aloud.
All the paintings are symphonies and some are
Wagnerian ones improvised from collapsible
tubes and scored with the stick end of a brush.

Power and a sincerity are suggested in the
high pitched color schemes, and one of these
days there may be many to worship at a new
shrine. Artists are already going in groups to
the little top floor gallery to take a look at these
effects, which leave Mr. Sorolla, a painter of
sunlight, in deep shade.

Mr. John Marin, in the same gallery, shows
twenty-five water-colors, many of which have
a tone that is inviting, while all have an origi­
nality that will draw to them the attention of
those who would see something in the medium
which departs radically from the conventions.
THE MEASURE OF GREATNESS

ANY effort to define a proper basis upon which to value human achievement is naturally attended with difficulty; there is probably no subject wherein wider divergence of opinion has been expressed and certainly none is harder of contemporary analysis; but in the light of judgment confirmed by the test of years, it would seem that there is unquestionably something common to all truly great, whether soldier, statesman, poet, painter or photographer, which is the determining factor in reaching a final appraisement. It is this quality, which we may call the spirit of the individual, rather than his work—which at best is but the expression of such spirit—which must be measured before a proper valuation can be obtained.

It is naturally difficult for one gifted with moderate attainments, and with a temperament styled artistic, to see either his own or his contemporary’s work from the objective viewpoint necessary for its proper estimation; but to him with clearer vision, it must be apparent that certain deductions can logically be drawn from the work and spirit of those accepted by the world as great, which should prove helpful to all who are willing to be so helped.

Certain it is that great work must be inspired by great and disinterested motives—without such motives the fitness of any work to survive may be questioned—certain also is it that great work can emanate only from great natures; conversely, that he who is capable of belittling himself and his work by selfish or unworthy motive is incapable of greatness, even though he may, for a time, persuade certain listless ones to accept the semblance of such for its reality.

Some, sincere in the conviction that they possess the divine afflatus, lack the saving sense of humour; some seem to assume that by clever simulation they can hoodwink posterity; but the test of time will show them both for what they are—they and their work will ultimately be measured by standards which are absolute and true.

And so it is with all others—let whomsoever is honestly striving to accomplish something in this world, feel that the true valuation of his effort is to be based upon the spirit which inspires such effort, and the world will be the better, not only by the creation of better work, but by the lessening in intensity of the note of overweening egoism which dominates so much of the product of modern endeavor.

HERBERT G. FRENCH.
A DREAMER is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.

The meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it as it was in his soul who wrought it.

A true artist takes no notice whatever of the public. The public are to him non-existent.

The Past is of no importance. The Present is of no importance. It is with the Future that we have to deal. For the Past is what man should not have been. The Present is what man ought not to be. The Future is what artists are.

Technique is really personality. That is the reason why the artist cannot teach it, why the pupil cannot learn it, and why the esthetic critic can understand it.

Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.

Oscar Wilde.
THE first five plates in this number of Camera Work are devoted to the work of Mr. Herbert G. French. A prominent officer in one of the largest business corporations in Ohio, he is a lover and patron of the arts and practises photography for no other purpose than the pleasure it gives himself. It is only under pressure that he permits his prints to be shown publicly or to be reproduced. We feel, however, that Mr. French is doing work which is distinctive, and often very beautiful; and that he is indubitably a factor in American pictorial photography. But it is virtually impossible to do many of his prints justice in reproduction, since Mr. French’s work is for the most part exceedingly sensitive and is presented in such a manner that the print is but the part of a scheme. The latter frequently is to illustrate a special edition of some favorite poem which he has had printed and bound for his own library. A few years ago his series of illustrations for the Arthurian legend, which was exhibited in the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, attracted much favorable comment. Mr. French’s original prints are all platinotypes.

The remaining four plates in this issue are the work of two photographers in collaboration. A little over two years ago, Alfred Stieglitz and Clarence H. White, in consequence of various lively discussions with some painters about portrait painting and the impossibility of the camera to do certain things, began a series of experiments to demonstrate the pliability of straight photography as a medium for portraiture and figure work and so disprove the painters’ contentions. These experiments were to serve at the same time as some technical tests of a certain brand of plates and a new lens. Although in the course of two weeks a series of sixty negatives was made, circumstances made it impossible to produce more than a few finished prints. It is hoped to complete the experiment in the near future. Meanwhile four of the series are herewith reproduced; not as a proof of anything in particular, but simply for what they are. The negative of the “Torso,” it might be added, was made by gaslight. In reproduction this picture loses none of the quality of the original print, but the two light silvery gray pictures only approximately convey the charm of the original platinum prints.

The Manhattan Photogravure Company, of New York, which is responsible for the plates in this number of Camera Work has done all in its power to reflect the spirit of the originals reproduced. When it failed it was due to the difference of processes, the impossibility of reproducing by any process a certain quality obtainable in platinum printing. All the gravures were made from the original negatives.
TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

THE next number of Camera Work, the last of the 1909 series, will be issued a few weeks late, as the Editor intends spending the summer in Europe, and does not wish the magazine to appear without his personal supervision. Communications addressed to Mr. Alfred Stieglitz, 1111 Madison Avenue, New York, and received during his absence, will receive proper attention. All personal communications will be forwarded, and duly answered.
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