

CAMERA WORK:

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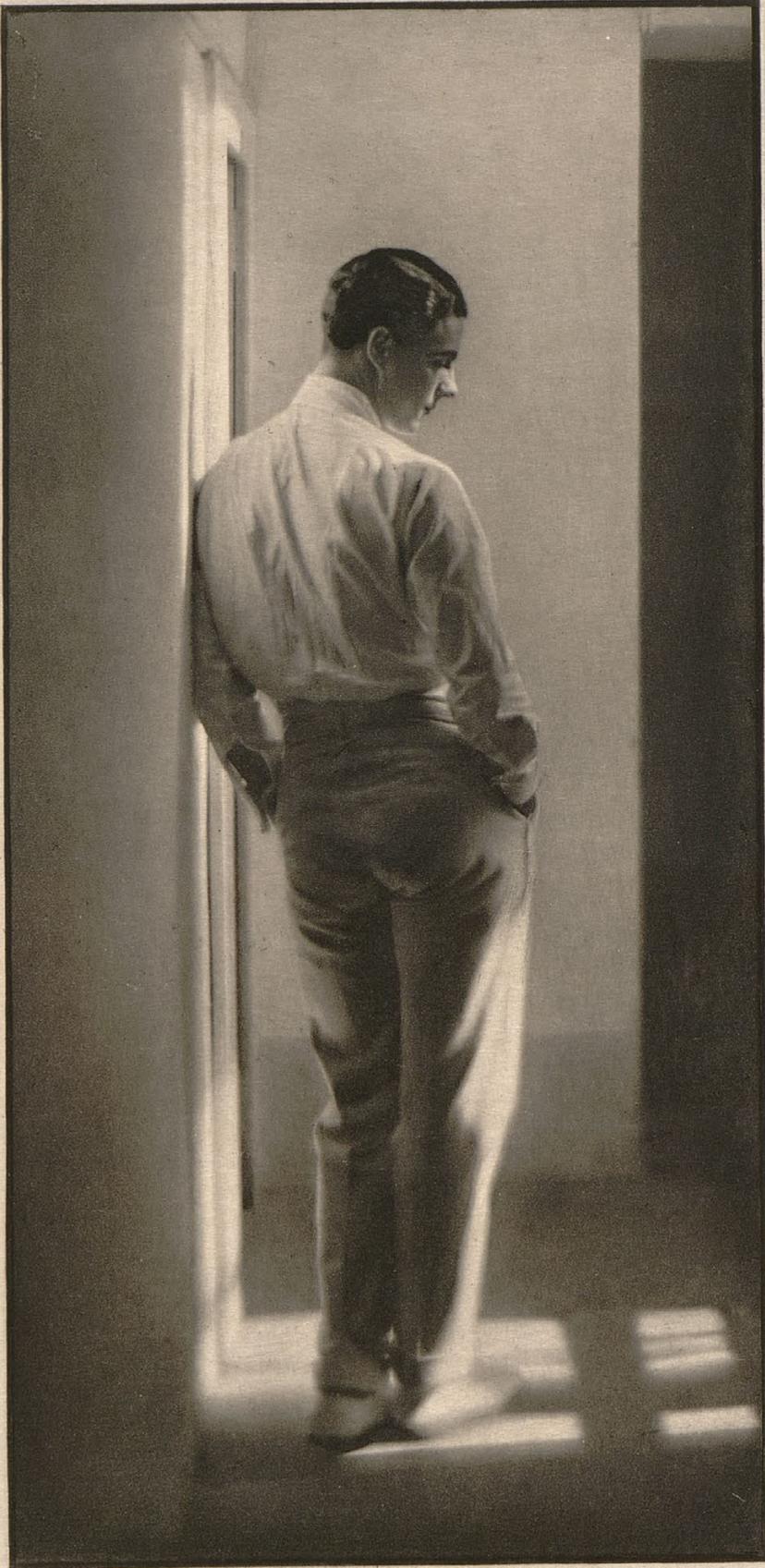












VAGUE THOUGHTS ON ART*

IT was on a day of rare beauty that I went out into the fields to try to gather these few thoughts. So golden and sweetly hot it was that they came lazily, and with a flight no more coherent or responsible than the swoop of the very swallows I was watching; and, as in a play or poem, the result is conditioned by the conceiving mood, so I knew would be the nature of my diving, dipping, pale-throated, fork-tailed words. But, after all—I thought, sitting there—I need not take my critical pronouncements seriously. I have not the firm soul of the critic. It is not my profession to know things for certain, and to make others feel that certainty. On the contrary, I am often wrong—a luxury no critic can afford. And so, invading as I was the realm of others, I advanced with a light pen, knowing that none, and least of all myself, need expect me to be right.

What then, I thought, is Art? For I perceived that to think about it I must first define it; and I almost stopped thinking at the fearsome nature of that task, till, slowly, there gathered in my mind this group of words:

Art is that imaginative expression of human energy which, through technical concretion of feeling and perception, tends to reconcile the individual with the universal, by exciting in him impersonal emotion. And the greatest Art is that which excites the greatest impersonal emotion in an hypothecated perfect human being.

Impersonal emotion! And what, I thought, do I mean by that? Surely I mean this: That is *not* Art, which, while I am contemplating it, inspires me with any active or directive impulse; that *is* Art, when, for however brief a moment, it replaces within me interest in myself by interest in itself. For let me suppose myself in the presence of a carved marble bath. If my thought be, "What could I buy that for?" Impulse of acquisition; or, "From what quarry did it come?" Impulse of inquiry; or, "Which would be the right end for my head?" Mixed impulse of inquiry and acquisition—I am at that moment insensible to it as a work of Art. But, if I stand before it vibrating at sight of its color and forms, if ever so little and for ever so short a time, unhaunted by any definite practical thought or impulse—to that extent and for that moment it has stolen me away out of myself, and put itself there instead, has linked me to the universal by making me forget the individual in me. And for that moment, and only while that moment lasts, it is to me a work of Art. The word "impersonal," then, is only used in this, my definition, to signify a needed, if only momentary, forgetfulness of one's own personality and its active wants.

So Art, I thought, is that which, heard, read, or looked on, while producing no directive impulse, warms one with unconscious vibration. Nor can I imagine any means of defining what is the greatest Art without hypothecating

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a perfect human being. But since we shall never see, or know—if we do see—that desirable creature, dogmatism is banished, “Academy” is dead to the discussion, deader than even Tolstoy left it after his famous treatise *What is Art?* For having destroyed all the old judges and academies, Tolstoy, by saying that the greatest Art was that which appealed to the greatest number of human beings, proceeded to raise up a definite new judge or academy, living at a given moment, as tyrannical and narrow as ever were those judges whom he had destroyed.

This, at all events—I thought—is as far as I dare go in defining what Art is. But let me try to make plain to myself what is the essential quality that gives to Art the power of exciting this unconscious vibration, this impersonal emotion. It has been called Beauty! An awkward word—a perpetual begging of the question; too current in use, too ambiguous altogether; now too narrow, now too wide—a word, in fact, too glib to know at all what it means. And how dangerous a word—often misleading us into slabbing with extraneous floridities what would otherwise, on its own plane, be Art! To be decorative where decoration is not suitable, to be lyrical where lyricism is out of place, is assuredly to spoil Art, not to achieve it. But this essential quality of Art has also been called Rhythm. And what is Rhythm if not that mysterious harmony between part and part, and part and whole, which gives what is called life; that exact proportion, the mystery of which is best grasped in observing how life leaves an animate creature when the essential relation of part to whole has been sufficiently disturbed. And I agree that this rhythmic relation of part to part, and part to whole—in short, *vitality*—is the one quality inseparable from a work of Art. For nothing which does not seem to a man possessed of this rhythmic vitality can ever steal him out of himself.

And having got thus far in my thoughts I paused, watching the swallows; for they seemed to me the symbol, in their swift, sure curvetting, all daring and balance and surprise, of the delicate poise and motion of Art, that visits no two men alike, in a world where no two things of all the things there be, are quite the same.

Yes—I thought—and this Art is assuredly the one form of human energy which really works for union and destroys the barriers between man and man. It is the continual, unconscious replacement, however fleeting, of one self by another; the real cement of human life; the everlasting refreshment, and renewal. For what is grievous, dompting, grim, about our lives is that we are shut up within ourselves, with an itch to get outside ourselves. And to be stolen away from ourselves by Art is a momentary relaxation from that itching, a minute’s profound, and, as it were, secret, enfranchisement. The active amusements and relaxations of life can only give rest to certain of our faculties by indulging others; the whole self is never rested save through that unconsciousness of self, which comes through rapt contemplation of Nature, or of Art.

And suddenly I remembered having read in a recent essay: “Art in its highest forms does not produce self-forgetfulness, but self-realization of an

extraordinary intensity and vividness; by cutting the ties of momentary matters it sets us free to be ourselves more fully, to live our own soul-lives more intensely.”¹

Ah! but—I thought—that is not the first and instant effect of Art; it is the *after*-effect of that momentary replacement of oneself by the self of the work before us; it is surely the *result* of that brief span of enlargement, enfranchisement, and rest.

Yes, Art is the great and universal refreshment. For Art is never dogmatic; holds no brief for itself—you may take it or you may leave it. It does not force itself rudely where it is not wanted. It is reverent to all tempers, to all points of view. But it is wilful—the very wind in the comings and goings of its influence, an uncapturable fugitive, visiting our hearts at vagrant, sweet moments; since even before the greatest works of Art we often stand without being able quite to lose ourselves! That restful oblivion comes, we never quite know when—and it is gone! But when it comes it is a spirit hovering with cool wings, blessing us from least to greatest according to our powers; a spirit deathless and varied as human life itself.

And in what sort of age—I thought—are artists living now? Are conditions favorable? Life is very multiple; “movements” are very many; interest in “facts” is very great; “news” batters at our brains; limelight is terribly turned on—and all this is adverse to the artist. Yet leisure is abundant; the facilities for study great; Liberty is respected. But far exceeding all other reasons, there is one great reason why in this age of ours Art, it seems, must flourish. For just as cross-breeding in Nature—if it be not too violent—often gives an extra vitality to the off-spring, so does cross-breeding of philosophies make for vitality in Art. Historians, looking back from the far future, may record this age as the Third Renaissance. We who are lost in it, working or looking on, can neither tell what we are doing nor where standing; but we cannot help observing that, just as in the Greek Renaissance, worn-out Pagan orthodoxy was penetrated by new philosophy; just as in the Italian Renaissance, Pagan philosophy, reasserting itself, fertilized again an already too inbred Christian creed; so now, Orthodoxy fertilized by Science is producing a fresh and fuller conception of life—a love of Perfection, not for hope of reward, not for fear of punishment, but for Perfection’s sake. Slowly, under our feet, beneath our consciousness, is forming that new philosophy, and it is in times of new philosophies that Art, itself in essence always a discovery, must flourish. Those whose sacred suns and moons are ever in the past, tell us that our Art is going to the dogs; and it is true that we are in confusion! The waters are broken, and every nerve and sinew of the artist is strained to discover his own safety. It is an age of stir and change, a season of new wine and old bottles. Yet assuredly, in spite of breakages and waste, a wine worth the drinking is all the time being made.

I ceased again to think, for the sun had dipped low, and the midges were biting me. The sounds of evening had begun, those innumerable far-traveling

(1) *Art, Life, and Criticism.* Edwin Björkman.

cries of man and bird and beast—so clear and intimate—of remote countrysides at sunset. And for long I listened, too vague to move my pen.

New philosophy—a vigorous Art! Are there not all the signs of it? In music, sculpture, painting; in fiction—and drama; in dancing; in criticism itself, if criticism be an Art. Yes; we are reaching out to a new faith not yet crystallized, to a new Art not yet perfected; the forms still to find—the flowers still to fashion!

And how has it come, this slowly growing faith in Perfection for Perfection's sake? Surely thus. When the Western world awoke one day to find that it no longer believed corporately and for certain in future life for the individual—when it began to feel: "I cannot say more than that there may be individual life to come; that Death may be the end of man, or that Death may be nothing"—it began also to ask itself in this uncertainty: "Do I then desire to go on living?" And, since it found that it desired to go on living at least as earnestly as ever it did before, it began to inquire why. And slowly it perceived that there was, inborn within it, a passionate instinct, of which it had hardly till then been conscious—a sacred instinct to perfect itself, now, as well as in a possible hereafter; to perfect itself because Perfection was desirable, a vision to be adored and striven for; a dream motive fastened within the Universe; the very essential Cause of everything. And it began to see that this Perfection, cosmically, was nothing but perfect Equilibrium and Harmony; and in human relations, nothing but perfect Love and Justice. And Perfection began to glow before the eyes of the Western world like a new star, whose light touched with glamour all things as they came forth from Mystery, till to Mystery they were ready to return.

This—I thought—is surely what the Western world has dimly been re-discovering. There has crept into our minds once more the feeling that the Universe is all of a piece, Equipoise supreme; and all things equally wonderful, and mysterious, and valuable. We have begun, in fact, to have a glimmering of the artist's creed, that nothing may we despise or neglect—that everything is worth the doing well, the making fair—that our God, Perfection, is implicit everywhere, and the revelation of Him, the business of our Art.

And as I jotted down these words, I noticed that some real stars had crept up into the sky, so gradually darkening above the pollard limes; cuckoos, who had been calling on the thorn trees all the afternoon, were silent; the swallows no longer flitted past, but a bat was already in career over the holly hedge; and round me the buttercups were closing. The whole form and feeling of the world had changed, so that I seemed to have before me a new picture hanging.

Ah!—I thought—Art must indeed be priest of this new faith in Perfection, whose motto is "Harmony, Proportion, Balance." For by Art alone can true harmony in human affairs be fostered, true Proportion revealed, and true Equipoise preserved. Is not the training of an artist a training in the due relation of one thing with another, and in the faculty of expressing that relation clearly; and, even more, a training in the faculty of disengaging from self the very essence of self and passing that essence into other selves by so delicate

means that none shall see how it is done, yet be insensibly unified? Is not the artist, of all men, born to be foe of partisanship and parochialism, of distortions and extravagance, the discoverer of that jack-o'-lantern—Truth; for, if Truth be not Spiritual Proposition I know not what it may be. Truth, it seems to me, is no absolute thing, but always relative, the essential symmetry in the varying relationships of life; and the most perfect truth but the concrete expression of the most penetrating vision. Life seen throughout as a countless show of the finest works of Art; Life shaped, and purged of the irrelevant, the gross, and the extravagant; Life, as it were, spiritually selected—that is Truth; a thing as multiple, and changing, as subtle, and strange, as Life itself, and as little to be bound by dogma. Truth admits but the one rule: no deficiency, and no excess! Disobedient to that rule, nothing attains full vitality. And secretly fettered by that rule is Art, whose business is the creation of vital things.

That aesthete, to be sure, was right enough who said: "It is Style that makes one believe in a thing; nothing but Style." For what is style in its true sense save fidelity to idea and mood, and perfect balance in the clothing of them. And I thought: Can one believe in the decadence of Art in an age which, however unconsciously as yet, is beginning to worship that which Art worships—Perfection—Style?

The faults of our Arts to-day are the faults of zeal and of adventure, the faults and crudities of pioneers, the errors and mishaps of the explorer. They must pass through many fevers and many times lose their way, but at all events they shall not go dying in their beds and be buried at Kensal Green. And here and there amid the disasters and wreckage of their voyages of discovery, they will find something new, some fresh way of embellishing life, or of revealing the heart of things. That characteristic of to-day's Art—the striving of each branch of Art to burst its own boundaries—to many spells destruction; but is it not rather of happy omen? The novel striving to become the play—the play the novel—both trying to paint; music striving to become story; poetry gasping to be music; painting panting to be philosophy; forms, canons, rules, all melting in the pot; stagnation broken up! In all this havoc there is much to shock and jar even the most eager and adventurous. We say, "I cannot stand this new-fangled fellow! He has no form! He rushes in where angels fear to tread. He has lost all the good of the old, and given us nothing in its place!" And yet, only out of stir and change is born new salvation. To deny that is to deny belief in man, to turn our backs on courage! It is well, indeed, that some should live in their closed studies with the paintings and the books of yesterday—such devotees and students serve Art in their own way. But the fresh-air world will ever want new forms. We shall not get them without faith enough to risk the old! The good will live, the bad will die; and to-morrow only can tell us which is which!

Yes—I thought—we take, and naturally, a too impatient view of the Art of our own time, since we can neither see the ends towards which it is almost blindly groping, nor the few perfected creations that will be left standing amidst

the rubble of abortive effort. An age must always decry itself and extol its forbears. The unwritten history of every Art will show us that. Consider the novel—that most recent form of Art. Did not the age which followed Fielding lament the treachery of authors to the Picaresque tradition, complaining that they were not as Fielding and Smollett were? Be sure they did. Very slowly, and in spite of opposition, did the novel attain in this country the fullness of that biographical form achieved under Thackeray. Very slowly, and in face of condemnation, it has been losing that form in favor of a greater vividness, which places before the reader's brain, not historical statements, as it were, of motives and of facts, but word-paintings of things and persons, so chosen and arranged that the reader may see, as if at first hand, the spirit of Life at work before him. The new novel has as many bemoaners as the old novel had when it was new. It is no question of better or worse, but of *differing* forms—of change dictated by gradual suitability to the changing conditions of our social life, and to the ever-fresh discoveries of craftsmen, in the intoxication of which, old and equally worthy craftsmanship is too often for the moment overlaid and lost. The vested interests of life favor the line of least resistance—disliking and revolting against disturbance. On the other hand, a spurious glamour is inclined to gather around what is new. And because of these two deflecting factors, those who break through old forms must always expect to be dead before the new forms they have unconsciously created have found their true level, high or low, in the world of Art. When a thing is new it is "nohow!" In the fluster of meeting novelty, we have even seen coherence attempting to bind together two personalities so fundamentally opposed as those of Ibsen and Bernard Shaw—dramatists with hardly a quality in common; no identity of tradition, or belief; not the faintest resemblance in methods of construction or technique. Yet contemporary estimate talks of them often in the same breath. They are new! It is enough. And others as utterly unlike them both. They, too, are new. They have as yet no other label. Lump them in!

And so—I thought—it must always be; for Time is essential to the proper placing and estimate of all Art. And is it not this feeling that contemporary judgments are apt to turn out a little ludicrous, which has turned criticism of late to the form, not so much of judgment pronounced, as of impression recorded—recreative statement—a kind, in fact, of expression of the critic's self, elicited through contemplation of a book, a play, a symphony, a picture? For this kind of criticism there has even recently been claimed an actual identity with creation, in a passage which runs thus: "Taste must reproduce the work of Art within itself in order to understand and judge it; and at that moment æsthetic judgment becomes nothing more nor less than creative art itself. The identity of genius and taste is the final achievement of modern thought on the subject of Art, and it means that, fundamentally, the creative and the critical instincts are one and the same."¹

Æsthetic judgment and creative power identical! I wondered, reading, and

(1) *The New Criticism*. Professor Spingarn. Columbia University, U. S. A.

still wonder! For however sympathetic one may feel towards this new criticism, however one may recognize that the recording of impression has a wider, more elastic, and more lasting value than the delivery of arbitrary judgment based on rigid laws of taste; however one may admit that it approaches the creative gift in so far as it demands the qualities of receptivity and reproduction—is there not still lacking to this “new” critic something of that thirsting spirit of discovery which precedes the creation—hitherto so-called—of anything? Criticism, taste, æsthetic judgment, by the very nature of their task, wait till life has been imprisoned for them before they attempt to reproduce the image which that imprisoned fragment of life makes on the mirror of their minds. But a thing “created” springs from a germ unconsciously implanted by the direct impact of unfettered life on the whole range of the creator’s temperament; and round the germ thus engendered the creative artist—ever penetrating, discovering, selecting—goes on building cell on cell, gathered from a million little fresh impacts and visions. And to say that this is also exactly what the re-creative critic does is to say that the interpretative musician is creator in the same sense as is the composer of the music that he interprets. And if, indeed, these processes be the same in kind, they are in degree so far apart that one would think the word creative unfortunately used of both.

But this speculation—I thought—is going beyond the bounds of vagueness. Let there be some thread of coherence in the progress of your thoughts, as in the progress of this evening, fast fading into night. Return to the consideration of the nature and purposes of Art! And recognize that you will seem, on the face of it, a heretic to the school whose doctrine was incarnated by Oscar Wilde in that admirable apotheosis of half truths, *The Decay of the Art of Lying*. Did he not there say, “No great artist ever sees things as they really are”; while you have put it thus: The seeing of things as they really are—the seeing of a proportion veiled from other eyes (together with the power of expression), is what makes a man an artist. What makes him a great artist is that high fervor of spirit which produces a superlative, instead of a comparative, clarity of vision.

Close to this house of mine there are some pines with gnarled red limbs flanked by beech trees. And there is often a very deep blue sky behind. Generally, that is all I see. But once in a way, in those trees against that sky I seem to see all the passionate life and glow that Titian painted into his Pagan pictures. I have a vision of mysterious meaning, of a mysterious relation between that sky and those trees with their gnarled red limbs, and Life as I know it. When I have had that vision I always feel that it is reality, and all those other times, when I am not so blessed, simple unreality; and if I were a painter, it is for such fervent feeling I should wait before moving brush. This, so intimate, inner vision of reality, seems in duller moments well-nigh grotesque; and hence that other glib half-truth: “Art is greater than Life itself.” Art is greater than Life in the sense that the power of Art is the disengagement from Life of its real spirit and significance. But in any other sense, to say that Art is greater than Life from which it emerges, and into which it must remerge,

can but suspend the artist over Life, with his feet in the air and his head in the clouds—Prig masquerading as Demi-god. "Nature is no great Mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life." Such is the highest hyperbole of the æsthetic creed. But what is creative instinct if not an incessant living sympathy with Nature, a constant craving like that of Nature's own, to fashion something new out of all that comes within the grasp of those faculties with which Nature has endowed us? The qualities of vision, of fancy, and of imaginative power, are no more divorced from Nature than are the qualities of common sense and courage. They are rarer, that is all. But, in truth, no one holds such views. Not even those who utter them. They are the rhetoric, the over-statement of half-truths, by such as wish to condemn what they call "Realism," without being temperamentally capable of appreciating what "Realism" really is.

And what—I thought—is Realism? What is the meaning of that word so wildly used? Is it descriptive of technique, or descriptive of the spirit of the artist, or both, or neither? Was Turgenev a realist? No greater poet ever wrote in prose, nor anyone who more closely brought the actual shapes of men and things before us. Was he a realist? No more fervent idealists than Ibsen and Tolstoy ever lived; and none more careful to make their people real. Were they realists? No more deeply fantastic writer can I conceive than Dostoevsky, nor any who has described actual situations more vividly. Was he a realist? The late Stephen Crane was called a realist. Than whom no more impressionistic writer ever painted with words. What then is the heart of this term still often used as an expression almost of abuse? To me, at all events—I thought—the words realism, realistic, have no longer reference to technique, for which the words naturalism, naturalistic serve far better. Nor do they imply a lack of imaginative power—which is as much demanded by realism as by romanticism. A realist, as I understand the word, may be naturalistic, poetic, idealistic, fantastic, impressionistic, anything, indeed, except romantic; that, in so far as he is realistic, he cannot be. The word, to me, characterizes that artist who invents tale or design revealing the actual inter-relating spirit of life, character, and thought, with a primary view to enlighten; as distinguished from that artist—whom I call romantic—who invents tale or design with a primary view to delight. It is a question of temperamental antecedent motive in the artist, and nothing more.

Realist—Romanticist! Enlightenment—Amusement! That is the true opposition. To make a revelation—to tell a fairy-tale! And either of these artists may use what form he likes—naturalistic, fantastic, poetic, impressionistic. For it is not by the form, but by the purpose and mood of his art that he shall be known, as one or as the other. Realists, we know, including the half of Shakespeare that was realist, not being primarily concerned to amuse their audience, are still comparatively unpopular in a world made up for the greater part of men of action, who instinctively reject all art that does not distract them without causing them to think. For thought makes demands on an energy already in full use; thought causes introspection; and intro-

spection causes discomfort, and disturbs the grooves of action. But to say that the object of the realist is to enlighten rather than to delight, is not to say that in his art the realist is not amusing himself as much as ever is the teller of a fairy-tale, though he does not deliberately start out to do so; he is amusing, too, a large part of mankind. For, admitted that the object and the test of Art is the awakening of vibration, of impersonal emotion, it is still usually forgotten that men fall, roughly speaking, into two flocks—those whose intelligence is uninquiring in the face of Art, and does not demand to be appeased before their emotions can be stirred; and those who, having a speculative bent of mind, must first be satisfied by the enlightening quality in a work of Art before that work of Art can make them feel at all. The audience of the realist is drawn from this latter type of man; the much larger audience of the romantic artist from the former; together with, in both cases, those fastidious few for whom all Art is style and only style, and who welcome either kind so long as it is good enough.

To me, then—I thought—this division into Realism and Romance, so understood, is the main cleavage in all the Arts; but it is hard to find pure examples of either kind. For even the most determined realist has more than a streak in him of the romanticist, and the most resolute romanticist finds it impossible at times to be quite unreal. Correggio, Guido Reni, Watteau, Leighton—were they not perhaps somewhat pure romanticists; Leonardo, Rembrandt, Hogarth, Watts—mainly realist; and Botticelli, Titian, Raphael, a blend of both. Dumas *père*, and Scott, surely romantic; Flaubert and Tolstoy as surely realists; Dickens and Cervantes, blended. Keats and Swinburne—romantic; Browning and Whitman—realistic; Shakespeare and Goethe, both. The Greek dramatists—realists. The Arabian Nights and Malory—romantic. The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Old Testament, both realism and romance. But how thin often is the hedge! And how poor a business the partisan abuse of either kind of art in a world where each sort of mind has full right to its own due expression, and grumbling lawful only when due expression is not attained. One man may not care for a Rembrandt portrait of a plain old woman; a graceful Watteau decoration may leave another cold; but foolish will he be who denies that both are faithful to their conceiving moods, and so proportioned part to part, and part to whole, as to have, each in its own way, that inherent rhythm or vitality which is the hallmark of Art. He is but a poor philosopher who holds a view so narrow as to exclude forms not to his personal taste. No realist can love romantic Art so much as he loves his own, but when that Art fulfils the laws of its peculiar being, if he would be no blind partisan, he must admit it. The romanticist will never be amused by realism, but let him not for that reason be so parochial as to think that realism, when it achieves vitality, is not Art. Art is but the perfected expression of self in contact with the world; whether that self be of enlightening, or of fairy-telling temperament, is of no moment whatever. The tossing of abuse from realist to romanticist and back is but the sword-play of two one-eyed men with their blind side turned towards each other. Shall not

each attempt at Art be judged on its own merits? If found not shoddy, faked, or forced, but true to itself, true to its conceiving mood, and fair-proportioned part to whole, so that it *lives*—then, realistic or romantic, in the name of fairness let it pass! For of all kinds of human energy, Art is the most free, the least parochial, and demands of us an essential tolerance of all its forms. Shall we, then, waste breath and ink in condemnation of artists because their temperaments are not our own?

But the shapes and colors of the day were now all blurred; every tree and stone entangled in the dusk. How different the world seemed from that in which I had first sat down, with the swallows flitting past. And my mood was different, for each of those worlds had brought to my heart its proper feeling—painted on my eyes the just picture. And Night, that was coming, would bring me yet another mood that would frame itself with consciousness at its own fair moment, and hang before me. A quiet owl stole by in the field below and vanished into the heart of a tree. And suddenly above the moor-line I saw the large moon rising. Cinnamon-colored, it made all things swim, made me uncertain of my thoughts, vague with a mazy feeling. Shapes seemed but drifts of moon-dust, and true reality nothing save a sort of still listening to the wind. And for long I sat, just watching the moon creep up, and hearing the thin, dry rustle of the leaves along the holly hedge. And there came to me this thought: What is this Universe—that never had beginning and will never have an end—but a myriad striving to perfect pictures never the same, so blending and fading one into another that all form one great perfected picture. And what are we—ripples on the tides of a birthless, deathless, equipoised Creative Purpose—but little works of Art?

But trying to record that thought, I noticed that my notebook was damp with dew. The cattle were lying down. It was too dark to see.

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

PLATES

AD. DE MEYER

- VII. Aïda, a Maid of Tangier
- VIII. From the Shores of the Bosphorus
- IX. A Street in China
- X. Windows on the Bosphorus









FROM VAN GOGH'S LETTERS*

WHAT always vexes me when I go to the Louvre is to be compelled to look on and see how the jackasses of Directors permit their Rembrandts to be destroyed, and allow so many beautiful paintings to be ruined. I could absolutely prove to you that the unpleasant yellow tone of several of the Rembrandts is due to damp or other causes such as heat, dust, etc. And that is why it is as difficult to say what was Rembrandt's color as it is to estimate exactly the grey of Velasquez. We might, for want of a better expression, speak of the Rembrandt gold; that helps; but it is but a vague hint.

When I came to France, I understood, perhaps better than many Frenchmen, two men for whom I have a sincere and boundless admiration—Delacroix and Zola. Having a fairly complete understanding of Rembrandt I found that Delacroix obtains his effects through color, while Rembrandt achieves his by values. Both men, however, are of the same rank. Zola and Balzac, who are also delineators of an entire age, offer the rarest artistic enjoyment to those who love them, in that they reproduce fully the age they picture.

Even if Delacroix paints mankind and life, instead of a period in general, he none the less on that account belongs to the family of universal geniuses. I dearly love the final sentences of an article written, if I am not mistaken, by Théophile Silvestre, with which he concludes a hymn of praise: "Thus died, laughing, Eugène Delacroix, a painter of great fame, who bore the sun in his head and the tempest in his heart; who passed from warriors to saints, from saints to lovers, from lovers to tigers and from tigers to flowers."

Daumier also is a great genius. Millet is another painter of a whole generation and its *milieu*. It is possible that these great geniuses are slightly mad, and that we also must be made to believe in, and to have a boundless admiration for them. If this be so, then do I prefer my madness to the cool reasoning of others.

To study Rembrandt—that, perhaps is the most direct way. But first, a word as to Frans Hals. He never painted the Christ, the Annunciation to the Shepherds, a Crucifixion or a Resurrection; nor did he ever paint sensual or gruesome nudes of women. Ever and always he painted portraits, nothing but portraits—portraits of soldiers, of officers of clubs, of magistrates in session for consultation—portraits of matrons with pink or yellow complexions, in white bonnets, in black woolen or satin dresses, discussing the accounts of an orphan asylum or hospital. He painted a tipsy drunkard, an old fishwife as a jolly witch, a beautiful Bohemian woman, a newborn baby on its pillow, an elegant cavalier in boots and spurs, the *bon-vivant* with swagger mustaches. He painted himself and his wife as young lovers, on a terrace in the garden, after their wedding night. He painted tramps, and laughing street musicians and a fat cook.

He can do nothing else, but all this is of equal rank with the *Paradise* of

* Translated from the German by Agnes Ernst Meyer.

Dante, the masterpieces of Michelangelo and Raffael, and, yes, even with those of the Greeks. It is as beautiful as Zola, but healthier and gayer, and just as true to life; for his times were healthier and less sad. What then is Rembrandt? Exactly the same—simply a portrait painter. To understand this more fully we must first have this sound, clear and comprehensive idea of these two Dutch masters who are the equal of each other. When we picture to ourselves the whole of this glorious republic which these two fruitful portrait painters bring in large outlines before our eyes, there is still much room left for the part played by landscapes, interiors, animal-pictures, and paintings of philosophical subjects. But I entreat you to follow carefully my conclusion which I hope to make clear to you in the simplest manner. Fill every corner of your brain with that master Frans Hals, the painter of portraits of an entire important, living and immortal republic. Fill, also, every niche of your brain with that no less great master of the Dutch Republic, Rembrandt van Ryn—a broad-minded man, and as natural and as healthy as Hals—and from this source, that of Rembrandt, we now see springing the direct and true pupils—Van der Meer of Delft, Fabricius, Nicolaus Maes, Pieter de Hooch, Bol, as well as the painters he inspired, Potter, Ruysdael and Ostade.

I have named Fabricius of whose pictures only two are known, yet I do not place beside them a whole handful of good painters, and above all, none of the imperfect diamonds, and it is just these impure stones who are most believed in by the French laymen. Have I made myself clear? I am attempting to indicate the big, simple solution—the painting of mankind, or, we might better say, the painting of our entire republic by means of portraits. Much later on we shall deal a little with Magi, sacred subjects, and female nudes—a matter of tremendous interest but not of chief importance.

I do not believe that the subject of Dutch art which we are discussing, in these days, is without interest. As soon as it becomes a question of manliness or originality or naturalism, it is very interesting to ask their advice. But I must first speak to you, of the two still-lives you painted and the two portraits of your grandmother. Has anything you ever did pleased you more? In any of your work, did you ever find yourself more, or express your individuality better? I think not. The thorough study of the first object, of the first person that came under your hands, was enough to make you work in earnest. Do you know what made these three or four studies of so much value to me? It was something in them inexplicately self-willing, something very clever, very conscious and firm, something sure—that's what it was. Never, my dear friend, were you nearer Rembrandt than then. It was in Rembrandt's studio and under the eyes of that incomparable sphinx that Van der Meer of Delft found the extraordinarily firm technique which has never been surpassed and which is now being feverishly sought for. I know now that we are seeking and striving for color as they did for chiaroscuro and values. But of what account are these small differences where the one question above all others is the question of strong self-expression?

Just at present you are engaged in studying the art methods of the early

Italians and Germans—the symbolic significance which the spiritualized and mystical paintings of the Italians may, perhaps, contain. Go ahead!

I came across quite a pretty anecdote about Giotto: A prize was offered for a picture which should represent the Virgin. A number of designs were sent in to the fine Arts Committee of the day. One of these, signed Giotto, is a simple oval, egg-shaped. The jury, though scenting a plot, proved their faith by assigning the work to Giotto. True or not, the story pleases me.

But let us now return to Daumier and to the portrait of your grandmother. When will you once more give us studies of such solidity in composition? I urge you most strongly to do this, although I, by no means, underestimate your attempts at line work and am not at all indifferent to the effect of contrasting lines and forms. The trouble is, my dear, old Bernard, that Giotto and Cimabue, like Holbein and Van Eyck lived in an obelisk-like *milieu* where everything was arranged as if on architectural pedestals, and where each individual was a block of building-stone; where all things supported each other forming a monument-like order of Society. When the Socialists shall have constructed their buildings on a logical plan (from which they are still far removed) that old social order will probably come to life again in similar form. But we, you know, live completely unbridled and in a state of anarchy. We artists, who love order and symmetry, we isolate ourselves and work ourselves to death, to get style into a single piece of work. Puvis knew that too well, and, wise and honorable man that he was, when he forgot his Elysian fields and came down to our own times, he painted a very beautiful portrait of "A Jovial Old Man," picturing him in a blue interior, reading a novel with yellow covers, with a glass of water, a water-color brush and a rose near him, and in addition an elegant lady such as the Goncourts have described.

Yes, the Dutchmen painted things as they are, and certainly without much deliberation, as Courbet painted his naked beauties; they painted portraits, landscapes and still-life. That is not the stupidest thing to do. But we, because we know not what to do, when we imitate them, we do so in order to avoid wasting, in barren metaphysical brooding, our puny strength which is unable to squeeze chaos into a tumbler. It is chaos just because it won't go into a tumbler of our making.

We are able to paint but an atom out of this chaos—a home, a portrait, a grandmother, an apple or a landscape—and that is precisely what those Dutchmen did who, for a methodical people, were devilishly clever.

* * * * *

Degas's painting is manly and impersonal, just because he was content to remain, in personal matters, a plain bourgeois who is not desirous of knowing worldly pleasures. He sees human animals about him living and enjoying themselves, and he paints them well because he made no claim, like Rubens, to be a cavalier and a man of the world.

I found here recently an etching by Rembrandt—the nude of a man, realistic and simple—and bought it. The figure is leaning against a door or

column, in a dusky interior. A ray of sunlight strikes, from above, the drooping face and thick red hair. It reminds me of Degas, so truly and so powerfully is the body realized.

Say, did you ever really look at "The Ox" or "The Interior of a Butcher Shop" in the Louvre? I hardly think you did. It would give me great pleasure to spend a morning with you in the Dutch Gallery. I can't write about them, but in front of the pictures themselves I could show you such beauties and wonders as will explain why it is that I give the primitives a second place in my admiration. I am just a little eccentric. A Greek statue, a peasant by Millet, a Dutch portrait, a naked woman by Courbet or Degas, by the side of these quiet and thoroughly realized perfect art the work of the primitives and the Japanese seem to me like script compared to painting. Of course, I am most keenly interested in this, but a completed work of art, that which is perfect puts us in touch with eternity, and to enjoy beauty fully is to give us a sense of eternity.

* * * * *

The Bible is Christ. The Old Testament is but a striving to reach this pinnacle. Paul and the Evangelists have their home on the other slope of the Holy Mount. How short a story it is! Heavens! Here it is written in a couple of sentences. Jews only seem to be in the world—Jews who explain suddenly that all but themselves are impure. All the other southern races under that sun—Egyptians, Indians, Ethiopians, Ninivites, Babylonians—why did they not write down their annals with the same care? The study of all these histories must be a beautiful one, and all those who are able to read them must be as worthy as those who cannot read them at all. But the Bible—the book which puts us in such a bad humor, which arouses in us despair and the deepest discontent; the pettiness and dangerous folly of which tears our hearts to pieces, this book holds within itself the spirit of consolation like a kernel in a hard shell—a bitter marrow—and that is Christ. The figure of Christ as I feel it, has been painted but by Delacroix and Rembrandt. Millet has painted only the teaching of Christ. As for the rest of religious painting, I can but smile at it pityingly; not from a religious but from an artistic point of view. The early Italians, Flemish and Dutch painters seem to me to be heathens, who only interest me as do Velasquez and so many others of the naturalists.

Christ was the only one of all the philosophers, magi, etc., who affirmed an eternal life, the non-existence of death, the necessity and importance of truth and devotion, as his principal dogma. He lived unerringly the artist's life, a greater artist than any other, despising marble, clay and the palette; for he worked with the living flesh. I mean to say that this marvelous artist who is incapable of being understood by that coarse instrument, the modern nervous and rotten brain, created neither statues nor pictures nor books. He says so himself most distinctly. But he created real, living people—immortals. This is a serious thing, especially since it is the truth. This great artist then wrote no books. Without a doubt the whole of the literature of Christianity would disgust him. For how rarely do we find in its literary productions such

mercy as we find in the Gospels of Luke or the Epistles of Paul, which are so simple in their hard and warlike forms. But if this great artist did not deign to write books about his ideas and sensations, he certainly did not despise the spoken word, particularly the Parable—What a strength lies in the parables of The Sower, The Harvest and The Fig Tree!—And who among us would dare to say that he lied when he prophesied contemptuously the fall of Roman buildings, and declared: Though Heaven and Earth will be destroyed yet shall my work not pass away.

These spoken words which Christ, as grand Seigneur, did not even think necessary to write down are the highest peak art has yet reached. In such pure heights art takes on creative power, the most exalted creative power.

Such reflections lead us far, far away; they even carry us beyond art. They permit us to get an insight into art that we may form our own lives and even in life to be immortal. And yet they are related to painting also. The patron of painting, St. Luke, physician, painter and evangelist, who unfortunately is symbolized by cattle, he is there to us, give us hope. But our true and real life is quite pitiful. We, poor and unfortunate painters, we vegetate beneath the stultifying yoke of a *métier* barely practicable upon this thankless planet where the love of Art makes real love impossible.

But since there is nothing against our believing in the existences of other planets and suns where the same line, form and color hold good, we may indulge in a certain cheerfulness as to the possibility of painting under more exalted conditions, in a changed existence, perhaps through phenomena no less incomprehensible and astonishing as are the transformations of the caterpillar into a butterfly, and the grub into a cockchafer. Such an existence of the painter-butterfly might have for a setting one of those countless stars which might not be less beyond our reach after death than are the black dots on a map which stand for cities and towns in our earthly life.

The understanding! Scientific logic, I think, will in the future be developed to an undreamed-of extent. For instance, at one time we took for granted that the earth was flat. It was quite right that we should think so. The earth is still flat from Paris to Asnières. That, however, did not prevent science from demonstrating that the earth is round, a fact which nobody denies to-day. In just the same way we take for granted at present that life is flat and leads from birth to death. It may be that life also is round and far higher in its dimensions and possibilities than this globe which, up to now, is alone known to us. It may be that coming generations will enlighten us on this interesting problem. Then, perhaps, science—with all due apologies—will arrive at the same conclusions, that Christ taught us as to the other half of life. Be this as it may, the fact remains that we are painters in real life, and that we must breathe the spirit of life into our creations so long as we ourselves continue to breathe.

A NEW FORM OF LITERATURE*

THE art-loving public has for some time been interested, if not pleased, by what is called Post-Impressionism in Painting and Sculpture, represented most prominently, as far as American knowledge of it is concerned, by the Paris painters Matisse and Picasso.

They are artistically strenuous persons who are passionately attempting to find a way to express more intimately and intensely the emotional-mood-subjective life of all of us than the historical forms in painting and art have been able to do. They attempt to set our dreams and our feelings out on to the canvas, making of our moods and sentiments objective realities.

In America, as far as I know, there is no writer at present who is influenced by the Post-Impressionist movement. In Paris there are writers who are attempting, with less success than the painters, to express those feelings, moods, and mental processes hitherto, as they think, inadequately reproduced in current literary forms.

There is an American woman now living in Paris who is, I think, the only American living who is trying to do in writing what Picasso and Matisse and others are trying to do in plastic art.

Her name is Gertrude Stein. Some years ago she published in America a book which only a very few persons have ever read. It was called "Three Lives," and, in form, it was what most people would call "weird." It was written in a style almost unreadable for its repetitions, its apparent childishness. It had no dramatic climaxes and next to no incidents. It had no sentimentality. It did not deal with any conventional or unconventional moralities.

I read it only because I had had my attention called to it in a special way. If I had come across it unexpectedly I would have thrown it aside as trash, imbecility, or pose, after reading a few pages. But with pain and difficulty I read on; the difficulty continued all the way through the book, but the pain gradually gave way to a kind of pleasure.

I began to see that, somehow, the picture of life was attained in this mass of repetition, simplicity, and apparent inanity. I began to feel the personages dealt with, the mood atmosphere in which they lived, their relations to each other. I felt the human situation, and this much more completely than is at all frequent in conventional novels even of power.

Few of us are aware at any one moment of what is going on within us. We are so active that we do not self-consciously dream and feel. We are not often fully aware of the contents of our mood at the time. This book of Miss Stein's makes us dream about the fundamental mood-realities of our existence. It gives us the sense of the mysteries of our inner lives, when the great simplicities of our inner lives are made prominent to our attention. We long, and fear, and hope, and desire, and when these are deep they are simple, always determining the color and quality of our mood. In action they are obscured and lost sight of. In this unconventional, actionless book they are brought out with mysterious power, and with no apparent art, with apparently childishness in form, and with not attractiveness.

In the current special number of *CAMERA WORK*, an art and photographic publication, the creator of which is Alfred Stieglitz, he of notorious Photo-Secession fame, Miss Stein has two little essays, one on Matisse and one on Picasso. In the same number are photographic illustrations of the work of these two artists.

These two little bits of writing by Miss Stein, recently done, are in the same line as her book, "Three Lives," but even more purely express the instinct for a new literary form. They would undoubtedly seem absurd to nearly all readers. Few words are used, and these are repeated over and over. To quote would be useless. It would be impossible to get the mood through anything but a long quotation—a very long one.

They naturally seem absurd, because they depart absolutely from the usual ways of criticizing and essaying. Miss Stein has been familiar for years with the work of Picasso and Matisse, and this work has sunk very deep into her imagination.

So when she writes these little sketches she does not formally criticize nor does she even state ideas or conclusions. There is no intellectualism in these essays, no comparisons, no authority or authorities mentioned or implied.

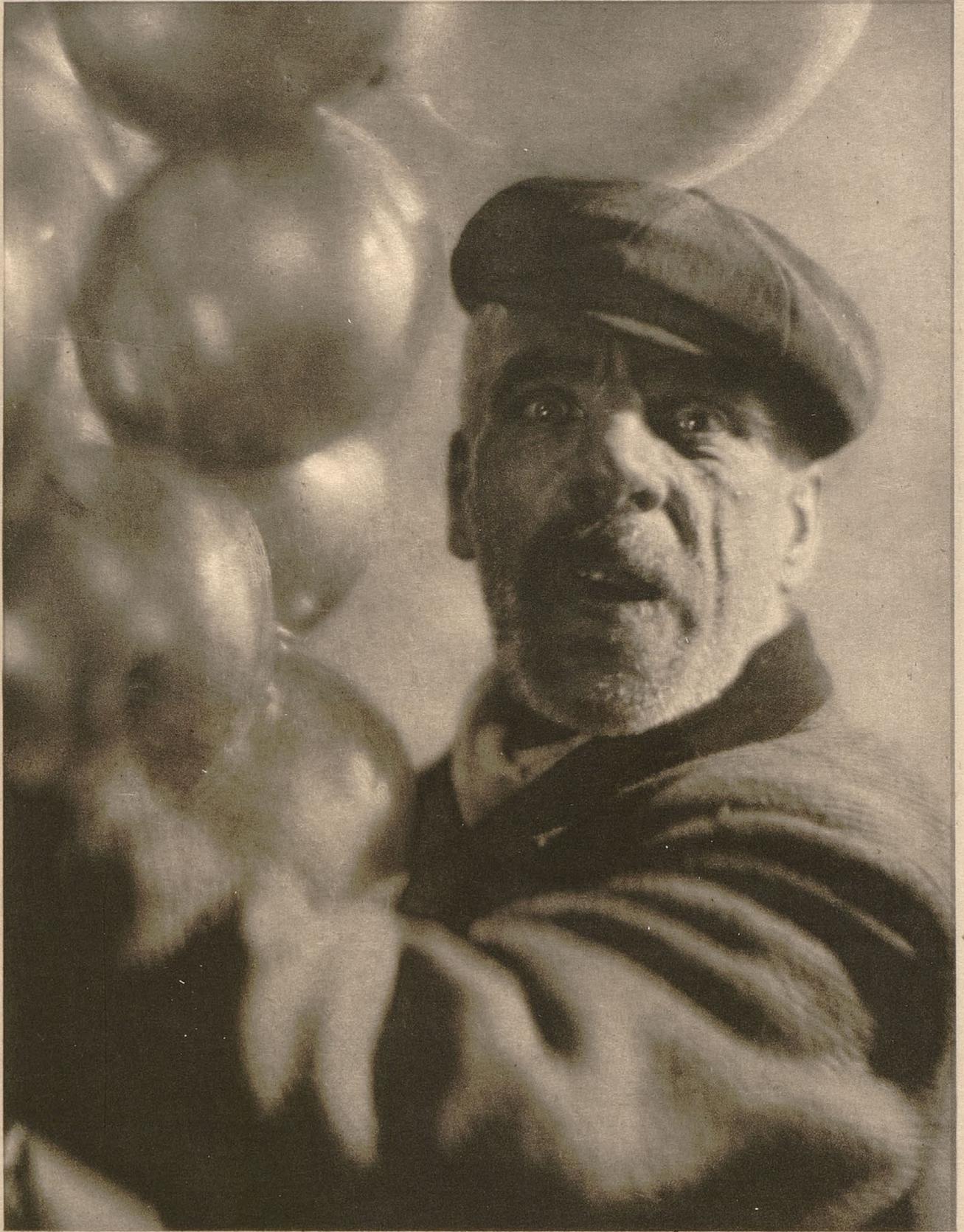
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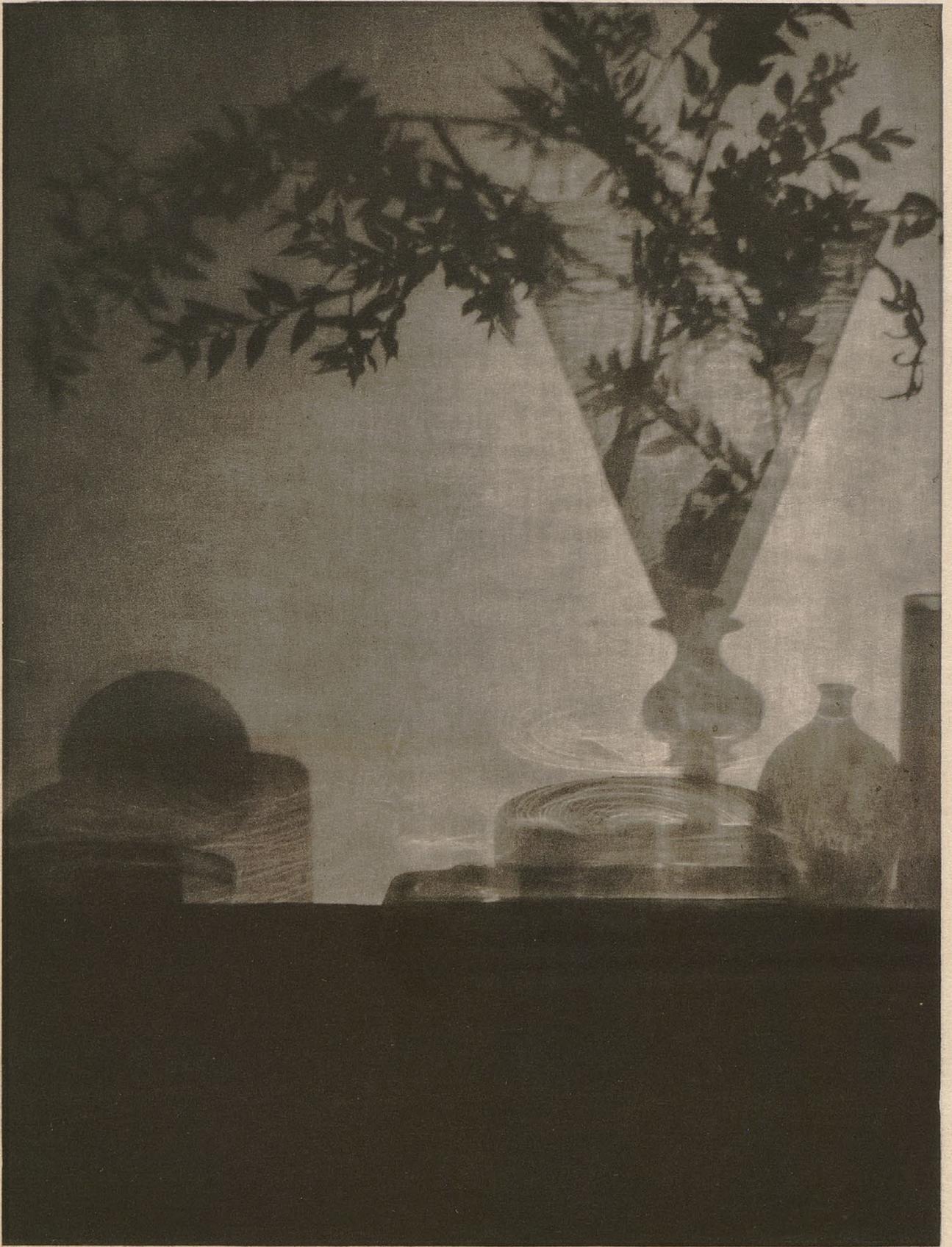
PLATES

AD. DE MEYER

- XI. Mrs. Wiggins of Belgrave Square
- XII. The Balloon Man
- XIII. Glass and Shadows
- XIV. The Fountain of Saturn, Versailles









She does not mention their work or their ideas, what they are aiming at, or how they are doing it. All she does is to try to do in words what they are trying to do in painting; or, rather, not what they are trying to do in painting, but what their moods and deeper dreaming consciousness is which leads them to do what they are trying to do in painting.

In this last paragraph, by the way, I have unconsciously, to a slight degree, imitated a fragment of her style, as far as it involves repetition.

The reader of these two little essays would undoubtedly think them ridiculous, and this no matter how intelligent he is. Perhaps, however, if he has had a good deal of sympathetic acquaintance with Post-Impressionist painting, he may see that Miss Stein is at least making an earnest experiment. He may permanently think she is unsuccessful in it.

But these two little things do call my attention voluminously to the fundamental character of the emotional impulse, with what William James called the fringe of consciousness, which dominates respectively Matisse and Picasso. They set us dreaming about the strenuous inner life of these two artists, and convey the fringe or surroundings they are in as regards society, and the broader human need.

They are intensely human, these little sketches. It is impossible to state what they say. They say nothing. But they try to suggest and partly do suggest a complete and simple mood, in which ideas, feelings, sensations, tendencies of the nerves, of hope, of the imagination are indissolubly combined.

Supposing you had had an experience, say of love, and in an hour of spiritual repose and contemplation, you were sitting in some soothing country place, your inner life all warm, brooding, not thinking, conscious of your love, and conscious of the way it was associated with nature, with work, with food, with the labor movement, with ambition, with life—just conscious of all this, vaguely, but not thinking about it.

Then if you were an artist and could hit upon some form, literary or plastic, in words or in painting, which would be a projection into space of this inner, deeper mood with all its "fringe" of suggestions, you would do what Miss Stein is trying to do in words, and what Picasso and Matisse are trying to do in paint.

HUTCHINS HAPGOOD.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS

ALL the plates in this number of CAMERA WORK are devoted to the work of Baron Ad. De Meyer, of London and Dresden. To the readers of CAMERA WORK De Meyer's photography is not new; he therefore needs no introduction; yet we feel that in this number the scope as well as the character of De Meyer's photography is for the first time adequately shown. The fourteen photogravures were made from De Meyer's original negatives by F. Bruckmann Verlag, Munich. The credit for the quality of the gravure work is due to Mr. Kaufmann, who is working under the direction of Director Goetz. Further comment upon the photographs and the gravures is unnecessary.

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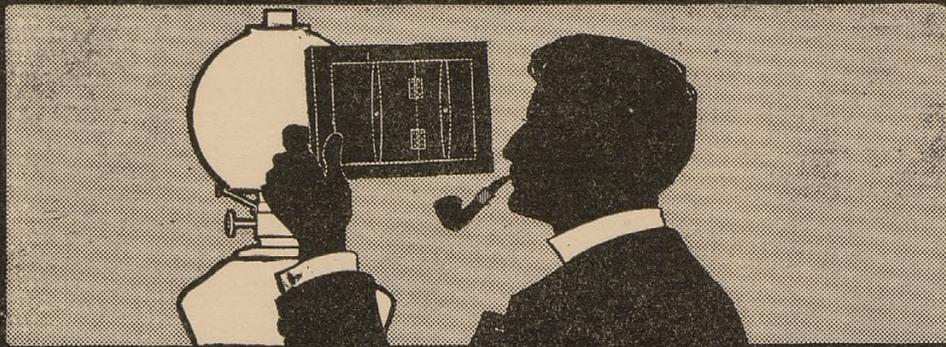
WITH this number *CAMERA WORK* completes its tenth year. Thus far forty regular and two extra numbers have been issued. For the coming year there are in preparation:

The STEICHEN NUMBER: This number has been in preparation for several years; it is finally on the press. It will in all likelihood be published as a Double Number. It will contain portraits of Anatole France, Henri Matisse, Gordon Craig, Bernard Shaw, Isadora Duncan, President Taft, Mrs. Lydig; landscapes, and other subjects. There will also be reproduced in color three of Steichen's oil paintings.

The CAMERON NUMBER: Will include photogravures made from Mrs. Julia Cameron's original negatives. Mrs. Cameron's work ranks with that of Hill. She was the most vital photographer of her time. The series of photogravures will include her famous portraits of Herschel, Tennyson, Darwin, and others.

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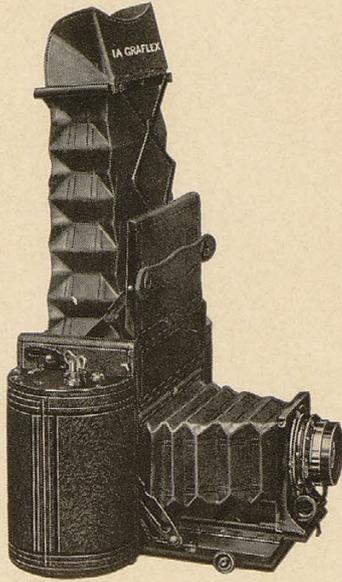
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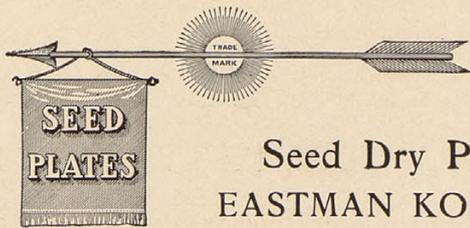
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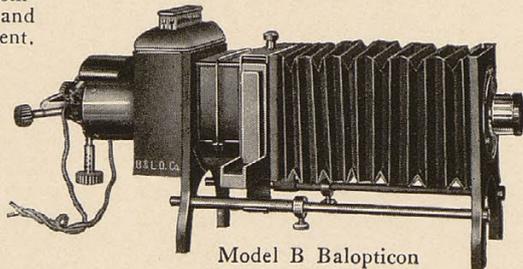
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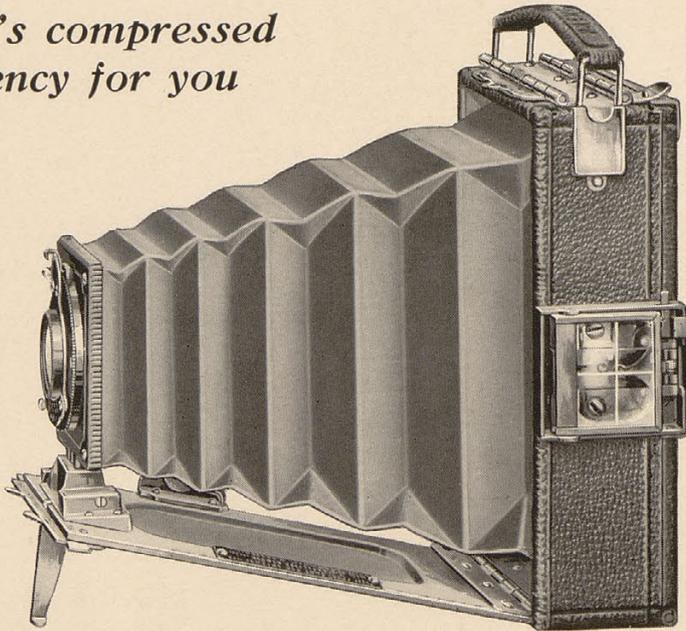
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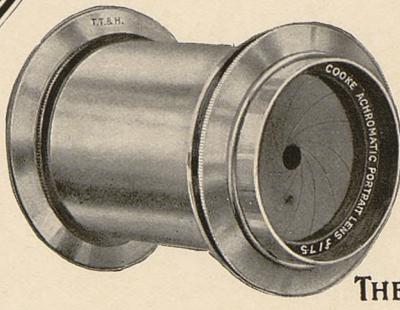
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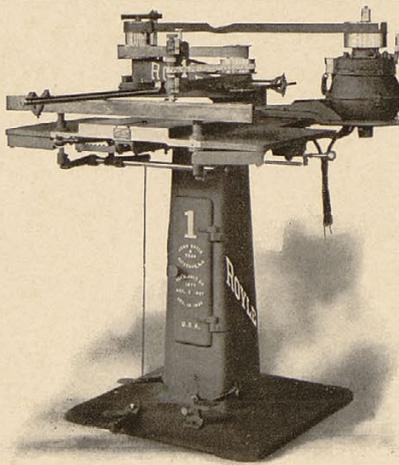
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