

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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NO. 98 B

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REMARKS BY DR. BRUNO E. WERNER ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS OPENING OF GERMAN ART OF THE 20TH CENTURY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK SEPTEMBER 30, 1957

The beginnings of contemporary art, the pioneer days, lie approximately between the announcement by Albert Einstein of his theory of relativity in 1905 and his publication of his general relativity theory in 1916. Perhaps this is a coincidence; but in all probability it is not.

At that time, groups of artists were gathering in several European countries, particularly in France, Germany and Italy, drawing up new manifestos and painting new pictures which caused considerable annoyance. Today the manifestos are forgotten, but the pictures remain. These were highly individual artists with highly individual temperaments at work. Soon, however, they came forward in a broad front and we saw that they carried a common flag. This flag showed the word "imago"-- meaning inner vision. All these artists, however they may have differed from one another, wished through their art to give visible shape to an inner experience.

In Europe, before the first world war, they united to form an orchestra, so to speak, even though two wars and political dictatorship have interrupted the "orchestra's" concert and, indeed, imperiled the artists themselves, we can still clearly hear - from our position today - the symphony which they presented in those years.

Each nation brought its own instruments to the orchestra: the Italians came with the futurism of Carra, Severini and Boccioni; the French with the Fauves Matisse, Rouault and Vlaminck, the cubism of Picasso and Braque; the Germans brought the artists who formed such groups as "Die Bruecke" and "Der Blaue Reiter"-- that is, with Nolde, Pechstein, Klee, Marc and Kandinsky, with Lehbruck and Barlach, those who represented the styles which we today call expressionism. Cubism was dominated by the Latin feeling for form. In expressionism a religious element came to the foreground. The painter Franz Marc, who like many other Germans, was something of a philosopher at heart, expressed that which was felt by my country's artists in this pioneer era: "It is our goal to create symbols which will belong to the altars of the coming intellectual religion."

Expressionism, above all, came like a thunderstorm in spring. It made its appearance in literature, especially in poetry. It came forward in music and in the theater. Though at first it was purely the concern of artists, following the first world war it took hold of the public mind and dominated the "twenties" in Germany. The "Roaring Twenties," that was expressionism. In those same years there originated what we can call a "German School." Just as the Ecole de Paris had many foreigners such as Picasso, Chagall and Modigliani, so the German school had the Russians Kandinsky and Jawlensky, the American Feininger, the Italian De Fiori and others.

German art of the 20th century is no stranger in this house. Since the founding of the Museum of Modern Art, artists from among my people have again and again been shown here. But today, indeed, we are faced with a ~~beautiful~~ ^{beautiful} ~~display~~ ^{display}. Even this, however, is not new; for it was scarcely mere than a quarter of a century ago when a German exhibition was shown here and Alfred Barr published his work "German Painting and Sculpture."

What is new, however, is that by this time at our mid-century vantage point we can in truth strike a balance, namely that of a half-century of German art. We have Mr. Andrew C. Ritchie and the friends of the Museum of Modern Art to thank for this.

Time and again the question is asked about modern art; "What will remain? -- Well, a great deal has lasted over a period of a half-century, much has become dear to us. For the rest we may apply what we find in the "Cantos Pisanos "

"What thou lovest well remains,
"The rest is dross;
"What thou lovest well is thy true heritage."

Thank you.