~~From Ralph Colin~~
Barr file

The Public Be Damned

By Huntington Hartford

MR. DONALD ADAMS, a critic writing in the New York *Times*, has the following to say about his profession: "I doubt that criticism has ever reached a point as low as that to which it has fallen today. With few exceptions, criticism has become a monkish practice, divorced from life, bastardized by the assumption of scientific method, written in intolerable English, a jargonized medium of exchange between a group of individuals talking to one another and busily thumbing their noses at the average intelligent reader."

With criticism in America, by its own admission, having fallen to such depths, it is hardly surprising that our standards of literature and the arts have fallen with it. But nowhere have these standards taken such a dive as in the field of painting. Why has the fiasco of modern art not been possible to the same extent in literature or music or the drama? First, because people have traditionally been able to walk into museums free; they are willing to be a bit gullible when it costs them nothing. Again, standards in painting have never been as obvious as in music or literature. If music lacks melody, it grates harshly on the ear. If a book uses too many garbled sentences, you stop reading. But painting — it's a free-for-all! You make up your own rules today, and anything goes.

Do many art critics deliberately set out to deceive and confuse and demoralize the public?

Let us look for a moment into the pages of the *Art News*, often considered the foremost magazine of its kind in the country. When the *Art News* sets to work to explain a painting, does the writer make a sincere effort to point out salient features which may help the intelligent reader to understand what he is talking about?

Mr. Willem de Kooning, Dutch artist turned American, spent two years working on a painting entitled "Woman" which was reproduced in varying stages of completion in the magazine. From every standpoint the final result was a hodge-podge, and I wondered how the critic would explain it.

"In the case of 'Woman,' de Kooning's latest," said he, "the stages of the painting . . . are neither better nor worse, more or less 'finished' than the terminus. Some might appear more satisfactory than the ending, but this is irrelevant." It was irrelevant to the *Art News*, in other words, whether the painting was better when completed than when it was begun. In fact, the critic went so far as to make a virtue of the delay in finishing it; he spoke of the work which de Kooning did in his Greenwich Village studio as a "voyage," and even talked about "the cities that were visited, friends that were met." Perhaps Mark Twain had a better idea of this picture when he told of the drawing of a lady who had as many arms as a spider because the artist could never decide which was the best pose.

How did the critic describe the painting itself? Let us quote him. "At first 'Woman' was sitting indoors on a chair. Then a window-shape at the upper right established a wall and distance — but she could have been outside a house as well as inside, or in an inside-outside porch space. This state of anonymous simultaneity (not no-specific-place but several no-specific-places) is seen more clearly in the few 'objects' which appeared, then disappeared around the seated figure. De Kooning claims the modern scene is no-environment and presents it as such."

WHAT kind of double-talk is this for the art departments of universities throughout the country to pass on to their students? "Ambiguity," says the *Art News* enthusiastically, "exactingly sought and exactingly left undefined has been the recurrent theme in 'Woman'."

I am frankly bitter against those who encourage obscurity in painting — bitter because the kind of warped thinking which creates it is one of the prime movers in the current dehumanization of the arts. I am bitter about the methods of mass production which require only bright flat colors and startling designs — regardless of subject matter! — to attract the eye in the pages of slick-paper magazines. I am bitter, most of all, against the critics for either their utter irresponsibility or their auto-hypnosis — I have been unable to decide which — concerning modern art.

You look at one of these contemporary abstractions, and you can't make head or tail of it. "Just use your imagination," the critic tells you, "and you will begin to see what it really means to you."

"What does it mean to *you?*" you ask a bit defiantly as you stare at utter chaos.

"A bluebird winging its way across a lagoon in the moonlight," he replies without a tremor.

"But I can't see that at all," you counter.

"Of course not!" he exclaims triumphantly. "To each individual the painting means something different. To John Doe it is a python slowly curling its way about an elephant's trunk. To Jim Jones it is Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street on a hot summer day. This painting was created with such purity and freedom of expression that no two human beings can see it in the same way."

What can you possibly answer to such nonsense? Having cleared the deck of all legitimate standards of art, the critics are quite free to make their own standards and establish their own little dictatorship. The art world has its constitution and its bill of rights too, my friends, and when you become party to their public burning in the streets, when you refuse to stand up for your own opinion even in so insignificant a branch of your life as this, you are hastening

the day when you will no longer have the opportunity to voice that opinion.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the art-loving public is not required to pay four-eighty top to spend an evening looking at paintings, for on occasion their reaction might be fully as vociferous as that of the theatre-goers, and the art critics might wake up to the true value of their wares.

Tennessee Williams recently wrote a play called *Camino Real*. The setting was classified in the program as having no time and no place. A chorus of dancers were described in the stage directions as having "a look of immense torpor as if they were stunned or drugged." The hero, Kilroy, walked about with a red light blinking on his nose talking about seeing "nothin' but nothin' and then some more nothin'." When Casanova made a long romantic speech to Camille about his shirt tails being aflame with love, she replied, "Don't con me."

Although Brooks Atkinson, the dean of the theatre critics, called this play "as eloquent and rhythmic as a piece of music," the public had a different opinion of it. "There have been plenty of indications," admitted the playwright, "that this play will exasperate and confuse a certain number of people. . . . At each performance a number of people have stamped out of the auditorium, with little regard for those whom they have to crawl over, almost as if the building had caught on fire, and there have been sibilant noises on the way out and demands for money back if the cashier is foolish enough to remain in his box."

IT EXASPERATED the public, all right, and closed in a few weeks. But if it had been an exhibition of "avant garde" modern art the critics would have managed to breathe artificial respiration into it for months.

It appears that I am doing a good deal of raving and ranting, and perhaps the long-suffering reader is beginning to wonder if all my comment is on the destructive side. Quite the contrary — I have definite standards and ideals concerning painting. But before I discuss them I would like to present a definition. I have used the word "abstraction" in reference to modern art and in general I used it as a catch-all to include a multitude of sins. But the word is also useful in a more positive sense: there is the need for a general term to represent painting — so prevalent today — at the opposite pole from the photographic. When ordinary objects are stylized to the point of being symbols, for example, the picture becomes an abstraction. When harmony of color and line is carried to the point of cubism, the result can be termed abstraction; when the desire of the artist (under the title of expressionism) is to project originality on the canvas at the expense of all else — once again abstraction. Perhaps I will even use the term when referring to certain acute cases of surrealism. I confess that in using one rather obvious word to encompass so many types of painting I am flirting with confusion; but I can only reply that there would be even more confusion were I forced to differentiate fauvism from futurism or dadaism from dodoism or doodlemania from — well, you see what I mean.

In my opinion there are definite standards of art which are capable of being easily understood not only by experts but by art lovers in general. I believe them to be of so universal a nature that no art critic — myself included! — can have the pleasure of announcing them as his own invention. Let us see what they are.

In the twentieth century we are scoundrels, are we not, if we are not broad-minded enough to accept the most flagrant kind of abstractionism as gospel? But is it not equally true that a painter living during the eighteenth century in France would have been burned in effigy if he did not worship at the shrine of the purely photographic?

Which of these schools of thought represents great art? It should be obvious to the merest neophyte in the subject that neither do; great art lies somewhere between the two extremes, in the area where the personality of the artist has a chance to express itself. I will go so far as to say that it always lies somewhere in the middle, and never at the ends. By the same token it becomes clear why the middle period of most great artists, as for example Rembrandt or Turner, was their most successful. In their youth the work of both Rembrandt and Turner was very photographic; learning to see and draw, they were almost copyists. In middle age there was an equitable mixture of the photographic and the abstract. Then in their last days they became too tired to bother much with subject matter, and their paintings became overly personal and stylized and esoteric.

WHY cannot the artist express himself easily at one end of the scale or the other — either by a photographic copy or a pure abstraction? The answer is simple. Suppose, for example, that he wishes to paint a portrait of his mother. If he paints her exactly as the eye sees her, he has plainly done no more and no less than the camera would have done; thus he has made no comment on her. If he permits his emotions, on the other hand, to carry him to the point where she is no longer his mother but (as Picasso painted and described his father) a group of packing cases, he has likewise made no comment — at least none that anyone is aware of. For the artist to react most effectively on canvas the painting must be neither too close to the subject matter at one extreme nor to his own emotions at the other.

To put it another way, there must be a particular subject or group of subjects for the artist to paint (and for us to understand). Given this, he must take us by the hand, figuratively, and lead us into the realm of the beautiful, the ideal — into the realm, if you wish, of the abstract and of the emotions. He must lead us from the small white cottage which he is painting to the memory of a cottage, perhaps, where we lived as a child. He must lead us from the objective study of one old man to a love for all the old men in the world. The great artist is a great personality, a great man; and it is this personality, working its magic on the subject matter, which metamorphosizes it into a form most appetizing to the observer. The pure essence of such everyday objects as a chair or a table of which Plato spoke might well afford a momentous preview in history of this flowering from the real into the ideal. But even in the ideal and eternal world of Plato, if I remember cor-

rectly, you could still distinguish the chair from the table.

GREAT PAINTING, whether as nearly photographic as a Holbein or as nearly abstract as a Cezanne — must, *must* have a little of its opposite to be great, just as there has usually been a dash of the opposite sex (whether male or female, no matter) in great personalities throughout history. A Holbein might seem at first glance to have been snapped by a camera, but nothing is farther from the truth — the artist has poured his life blood into it. His subject may seem to the casual observer no more than a simple drawing or an unobtrusive portrait, but this simple drawing is perhaps one of the greatest ever placed on canvas, and there is a reason for the fact. Dull and stodgy — from the "avant garde" point of view! — Holbein manages to step right into the bailiwick of the abstractionists and emerge with his own individual samples of color and design and beauty (that "terrible word," as the *Art News* calls it) which the most modern painter might be proud to emulate.

By the same token a Cezanne, on the other hand, might sometimes seem so impressionistic that it appears incoherent. But whether it was a house, or a forest, or a portrait, or a group of swimmers, it may certainly be said of Cezanne, though he used the abstract to great advantage, that he rarely permitted himself to be swallowed up by it. It was generally his servant, not his master. And to what purpose did he use it? To find a subject in the twining of trees or the interplay of human limbs teetering so close on the brink of pure design that with the flick of a wrist he might turn it into an Oriental arabesque? Far from it! Though Cezanne's works may seem engrossed with design and the contrast of color, they are engrossed for only one reason — to bring out the spirit and the inner essence of the subject which he happens to be painting. After walking through forests for years he has finally discovered all the significant details which make it a forest instead of a bar in Chicago and he is attempting to put them down on canvas. What is his ambition in doing so? Why would he not be satisfied with a colored photograph on the one hand or an arabesque on the other? Because he wants to make the forest he reproduces as close as a human being can possibly make it to the one which he sees and feels and hears and smells in his wanderings. He will never succeed in replacing an actual walk among the trees with his canvas, but at least he will be able to say to us: this painting reminds you of the trees, doesn't it? It makes you want to take a walk in those woods back home where you played as a child, isn't it so?

AT THIS point I can hear artists screaming on all sides — "Hey, wait a minute! It's all very well to talk about making a comment on real people and real objects, but you're only being naïve. We've gone far beyond real objects. It is our inalienable right as artists to make any kind of comment we want on canvas, with no more regard for the dull and pedestrian Reality of which you talk than for the people who happen to see our painting. We, the artists, are individualists, and our aim in working laboriously at our task is to express ourselves to the fullest of our capacity; what right have you to circumscribe us with petty rules and regulations?"

With the spirit of such a speech, I must admit, I am in full accord; self-expression in an artist is the most fundamental of virtues. I will even go so far as to agree, at the risk of an inconsistency somewhere along the line, that from a certain aspect it is acceptable for the artist to ignore his public. "To thine own self be true" — if the artist is sincerely true to the best that he has to offer, there is little need of his worrying about what the public thinks. There is at least one point, however, at which I disagree with the contemporary artist, and this point, like the Russian veto in the United Nations, is sufficient to throw all my palm branches into the fire. It is quite impossible for me to believe that there can be any genuine artistry, any real truth, any individuality, yes, any self-expression — unless the artist is willing to accept the fact that a world which is reasonably recognizable to the public must be the basis of all his work.

WHAT is it that makes me feel so strongly that recognizable subject matter is indispensable to painting? Why is it not possible for painting to limit itself to forms and colors as music is limited to the abstraction of sounds? Why cannot Tennessee Williams restrict the language of his plays to symbols? No reason; it is quite possible to conform to these restrictions, but don't call the result great art. Great art has never been limited, except by the degree of historical advance of the era in which it was created. In France, Poussin and Claude Lorrain in painting and Racine in drama were confined by the classical tradition still prevalent in their time. In England, Defoe was forced to pretend that *Robinson Crusoe* was a true story and not merely fiction in order that the people of the seventeenth century would accept it. In Germany, the mighty Bach was required to compose for the well-tempered clavichord in lieu of a fifty-piece orchestra. But it will be readily admitted that the work of all these men would have been even greater without such obvious handicaps. The number of great men in the history of art who have knowingly and purposely limited their work by not taking full advantage of the intellectual and technical progress of their era could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Let us assume that each of the arts desires to communicate with its audience — forgetting, for the moment, the fashionable thinking of our day that art is purely for a "private thrill of release" — as Tennessee Williams calls it — and not for the public.

Now if you wish to communicate with someone, it seems to me that you would be foolish not to use the best means at your command of doing so. The deaf-mute communicates by means of a sign language. The Australian bushman probably does so by a means almost equally primitive, and the only means of communication of a dog with one of its kind is rubbing noses or perhaps wagging its tail. Is it not obvious that all these living beings would prefer to speak with the language of words which has been developed over thousands of years rather than in the halting fashion which their

natures and circumstances force upon them?

Over the years the various arts have also developed their means of communication with their chosen audiences to the best of their abilities. The composer has learned to use melody and rhythm and richness of tone. The writer has learned to get his dramatic impact by the wonderful use he has found of those words of which we have been speaking. And the painter — ! He has learned a language, too, and though he does not have the completeness and variety of the spoken language at his command for the purpose, he has another which in its way is equally important — the subject matter of the daily scene in which we live. One picture is worth a thousand words, say the Chinese, and there is profundity in the statement. There is a swiftness and excitement in the painter's manner of telling a story by depicting real objects on canvas which the writer himself has often envied. Is there any more sense in the painter giving up the very reason for his use of lines and colors in the first place — the realism of subject matter — than there is for the author to write abracadabra such as James Joyce attempted? Why throw unnecessary obstacles in a path which predecessors for so many centuries have been trying to clear? Of course, it is true that music has been composed without melody or even noticeable rhythm and plays have been written with symbols or in pantomime and paintings have become abstract. But I honestly do not believe — and would be glad to be corrected if I am wrong — that much recognized as really great has come out of such efforts. The reason is evident. In each case the method of communication so carefully developed over the years has been partially destroyed, and whatever the artist may have had in mind when he created the work, only a portion of it reached the audience.

To me great works of art have a decided similarity to great human beings — they are both three-dimensional. How rare it is to find the man who is at once gentle and strong, tender and decisive; how rare the man who has the sensitivity of great intelligence, and yet the toughness to withstand those "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." This similarity of great works of art to great men, in fact, is nowhere seen so clearly as when the one is produced by the other. Do you not have a good idea of Michelangelo from a prolonged look at the Sistine Chapel? Do you not know Rembrandt from his magnificent self-portrait in the Frick? Can you not see the wild imagination and yet infinite subtlety of Turner in his pictures of Venice? Can you not feel the depth and tragedy of Goya in his *Execution of the Defenders of Madrid* and of Toulouse-Lautrec in his brief sketches of the Moulin Rouge? Do you not know Van Gogh from his wheat fields and Gaughin from his Tahitian studies and Cezanne from his houses and rocks and streams? But what in heaven's name do you know about the author of a pure abstraction? You can only imagine him as some kind of nebulous two-dimensional figure floating about in a dream.

A final word on the subject of the abstract in art. We have seen it in two different lights; first, at the opposite pole from the photographic, as the ideal, the vision; and second, when carried to extremes, merely as a hindrance to communication. There is a third way in which the influence may be regarded, especially in its more rigid forms — as the trade mark of the modern world. We live in the atomic age, in the age of straight lines, from the paths of bullets and jet planes to the streets and skyscrapers which crowd our cities. We live in a web of mathematics, where the personalities who think in terms of an IBM machine are the ones who receive the greatest acclaim. It is only natural that the graphic arts should be affected by all this, and that straight lines and circles and cubes and flat colors should be the order of the day. It is hardly surprising when painters in the modern city imagine that the mechanization seen on every side is the perfect lens through which to study the jungles of Africa — or of the human mind.

I am not attempting to evaluate this state of affairs; I simply observe it in passing. But there is no doubt that the advertisers and dealers are playing it for all it is worth. And if the pictures which they desire from the artist become increasingly similar to blueprints of a bolt and screw factory or designs from the *Vogue Pattern Book*, the law of supply and demand must apply. Nowhere is this kind of demand so great as in our mass-production magazines, where the artist receives most of his publicity. A traditional painting, cut down to a fraction of its size in the pages of *Life*, is a disaster. A Turner or Rembrandt becomes so fussy in line and muddy in color after being reduced to a few inches in diameter that no one would be inspired to see the original. But a Matisse or Picasso! With their broad flat colors and oversimplified strokes they lose none of their character; in fact, they gain in the process.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that you agree upon the general manner in which an artist must express himself. But why express himself in the first place? What is the purpose of the art of painting? If it is no more than to preserve a facsimile of the subject for the historical record, then the camera would quickly replace the brush and palette. If it is only to give sensuous pleasure by means of a careful balance of lines and brush strokes or to shock us by some hysterical outburst, then great art could be replaced by an opium pipe or a small charge of TNT under the nearest bush and the artist would become a thing of the past.

The purpose of great art, in my opinion, is a moral one; without such a purpose, one would be at a loss to explain the tremendous veneration in which art and artists have been held even to the irreverent present. There has been a good deal of talk about the phrase "art for art's sake"; the argument concerning the true nature of a work of art was very likely going on back in the days of the cave dwellers. Does the artist work for the entertainment of his audience solely, or ought he to have the additional motive of attempting to elevate us? With the advent of commercial art the breach between the two schools of thought has become wide enough to drive a truck through, the authors

of *Saturday Evening Post* covers considering most of modern art created in an ivory tower, and the independent artists looking down upon their better paid rivals as having sold themselves to the devil.

To apply a sharp blade to this Gordian knot, could it be, perhaps, that both sides are partially right? On the one hand, standards and ideals — yes, even messages if you like; on the other, pure entertainment! In the roaring inferno of the twentieth century, in this world of violent extremes where moderation is looked upon only as naïveté, it is perhaps a little difficult to imagine a blue-nosed Ideal lying down side by side with a pink-cheeked Pleasure. Yet such has been the formula, certainly, for most of the great works of art from Rabelais to Van Gogh; the lion has lain down with the lamb, for is not the feminine softness of the one combined with the masculine strength of the other sufficient to conquer the world? The *Pickwick Papers* and *A Connecticut Yankee* — what humorists their authors were! Yet one needs hardly a moment's pause to realize that both Dickens and Mark Twain were primarily concerned in such writing with dark and sombre social problems, of their own time and of "the good old days," as Dickens bitterly called them. Humor was the cloak to prevent them wearing their heart on their sleeve; in fact, without the depth of feeling which both these great writers possessed, neither could have been the humorists they were.

There are many great paintings, and certainly it would be difficult for even the hair-splitter in esthetics to find a moral purpose in all of them. If a painter tells a story, as in the case of *The Last Supper* or *The Descent from the Cross*, the moral is an obvious one, and even the most literal person will have no difficulty in understanding what the artist is trying to say. But in the large majority of paintings, particularly those of modern times, the moral is sublimated in such a way by the nature of the subject matter that it is almost invisible to the naked eye. What lesson can one draw, for example, from looking at a landscape of Inness or a seascape by Homer? The fact that the lesson is not easily expressed in words, however, is no indication of its absence; the teaching is simply taking place without the knowledge of the pupil. It is the old lesson which Beauty has taught for so many years without material compensation, the lesson of goodness and kindness and strength which has caused poets to identify it with the word "truth." But in cases where such beauty is indeed absent, particularly if it happens to be replaced on the canvas by ugliness or filth, there is little doubt of the alacrity with which the average observer will recognize the loss.

A CRITIC by the name of Aline Saarinen has written an article in the *New York Times Magazine* entitled "Cultural Diplomacy: An Art We Neglect." In this article she strongly criticizes the American government for its lack of interest in modern painting. Concerning an important function in Brazil she is incensed because "the American ambassador neither appeared nor sent a duly authorized delegate" to stand in the receiving line in the American exhibition. Sympathetically she quotes a Brazilian: "He's probably playing golf. Isn't that what Americans in public life do?" Mrs. Saarinen remembers vividly the "inquisition" to which Congress subjected members of the State Department in 1946 when they sent an exhibition of our modern art abroad; she "thinks of the prevailing violent antagonism of the majority of Congress toward modern art today."

May I suggest a reason why, Mrs. Saarinen? Do you ever read the Bible of the art world in America today, the *Art News*? Would you like to hear a quotation from the February, 1952, number of this magazine?

". . . The shock of the impact of these disgusting paintings should have indicated what a fine artist he was . . . By throwing quality away, quality is what he attains."

Would you expect a member of Congress or anyone else, for that matter, to react favorably when such verbal and pictorial garbage is constantly being thrown in their faces in the guise of roses?

In your article, Mrs. Saarinen, you ask why the State Department will not "overtly and enthusiastically" support exhibitions chosen by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Perhaps I can offer a reason. I don't wish to sound like a prude, but if a student wanders into this museum and happens to pick up a book which it publishes for the benefit of one of its favorite artists, Salvatore Dali, what will his reaction be?

"Shortly after his arrival in Paris [says the book] Dali evolved what he later called 'the paranoiac-critical method' defined as a 'spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based upon the interpretive-critical association of delirious phenomena. . . .' The first of the several thematic obsessions which the paranoiac-critical method led him to record was concerned with the legend of William Tell. . . . It becomes not a legend of filial devotion, but one of incestuous mutilation. . . ."

Instead of a famous archer attempting to shoot an apple off his son's head (according to the legend which is said to embody the spirit of Switzerland) we now have a medical case in which a father — if I interpret Dali correctly — makes some interesting new kind of love to his son by attacking him with arrows. Oh, school days, school days! And if by chance our student continues to read the story of Dali in Paris, he will shortly arrive at the following comment: "A second and equally lasting thematic obsession reflected in his art was supplied by his appraisal of Millet's famous painting, *The Angelus*, as a monument to sexual repression."

The Angelus a monument to sexual repression! That painting which captures the spirit of religion perhaps better than any other of modern times — certainly one of the most popular pictures ever painted — this masterpiece depicts, according to Dali, not "the vesper hour, when the soft chimes call the toiler to thankful rest," but a stealthy tribute to secret vice. What do you say to that, Millet, old man?

A CURRENT Broadway hit describes the fury of an author when he finds the innocent title of his book changed by the publisher to *Of Sex and Violence* in order to sell a few more copies. Such fascination with the subject of violence is not confined to the publishing business — it extends to the painting world as

well. For artists who paint in a confused and embittered manner there is always the stock defense; they are only mirroring the chaos of our time. The line between mirroring chaos and being so preoccupied with it as to encourage it, however, is a fine one. One cannot help recognizing the fact that the philosophy of hatred preached in many quarters of the world today has had its effect on the work of our contemporary artists, and our critics have done little to discourage the trend. If one dares to mention the ugly word Communism, in fact, in connection with a contemporary work of art, the critic will hasten to explain that painting in Russia today is completely regimented, and the Communists paint in an utterly conventional and photographic manner. But what does that prove? The spirit of revolution which Lenin let loose upon a troubled world was forever silenced within Russia itself when Stalin dropped the Iron Curtain, and it would be surprising if the situation were otherwise in a dictatorship. But this fact has never prevented the Communists from peddling their wares outside the homeland.

At any rate, whether because of a twisted political philosophy, or an effort to shock the public into sales, or merely a desire to set themselves up as high priests of a culture from which the public is excluded, many artists today are certainly guilty of encouraging disorganization and violence in their painting. And this is often true of the realists as well as the abstractionists (partially for the reason, perhaps, that it is difficult to show any emotion whatever by means of a pure abstraction).

In a western world constantly professing to seek the dove of peace — a favorite symbol of Picasso's — it is strange that artists who are most aggressive not only in their personal philosophy but also their work are generally given the place of honor by the critics. "There ought to be a dictatorship of painters, a dictatorship of one painter," says Picasso, "to suppress all those who have betrayed us, to suppress the cheaters, to suppress the tricks, to suppress mannerisms, to suppress charm, to suppress history, to suppress a heap of other things." So far as his career is concerned I will give Picasso credit — he has gone an amazing distance toward wiping out single-handed all the gains that have been made in the world of painting for the last five hundred years. His dictatorships and his suppressions, with the help of an army of critics, museum directors, magazine editors, and dealers have gone farther, I am sure, than his wildest dreams in destroying the culture of the past in his chosen profession.

Other painters of our time, equally anarchistic in their work if not their philosophy, have managed to obtain the blessing not only of the critics but of the church as well. Matisse is one of them; Georges Rouault another. It is the work of these three painters and their followers and cohorts which is being taught all over the country in our schools today.

Let us examine one of those paintings of Jesus Christ by Rouault. In the words of the conundrum, what is wrong with this picture? Does this particular portrait carry the banner for religion? The first thing that strikes the eye upon observing it is a muddy color throughout and a few heavy black lines which are intended to depict the outline of the tortured figure. Here and there the paint has been applied in so careless a manner that one can clearly see that it has run halfway down the canvas. The overall effect, needless to say, is one of extreme ugliness both of color and of delineation. Has the painter intended it that way? Why, to be sure. He is portraying the last agony of the Saviour upon earth, and the more violently he can impress us with the horror of the situation the more successfully, in his estimation, he will have told his story.

But it is at this point that I wish to take exception. He has not convinced us of the horror of the situation. Why not? For the simple reason that he has presented nothing in the picture with which we can truly identify ourselves. To be more specific, he has presented the one figure in the scene by which the entire painting stands or falls, Christ, as unsympathetic. Had he wished, he might have placed the hill of Calvary in Dante's Inferno and my imagination could have gone along with him. But to present Jesus as ugly, stupid, bleary-eyed — if one can make out what He looks like at all in such a picture — has affected me to the point where I can't really believe that He has been worth all the adoration that so many generations have extended Him. Are we wrong about the intention of the painter, after all? Was his real purpose in creating this painting the destruction of religion rather than the furtherance of it? The mind may protest, and yet it is this very kind of suspicion which is so often verified by the bitter pronouncements of many of the artists of our day. When the church is on the lookout for works of art it would do well to consider whether or not the spirit of the work is as religious as the subject matter.

"I don't know anything about painting, but I know what I like." How often has the average intelligent person blurted out this credo of false modesty! In the matter of good taste and judgment concerning the arts I believe that the average intelligent American can hold up his head with the best of the critics, and it is high time that we stop apologizing for our amateur standing. If anything is to be done to halt the downward trend of esthetic standards in America today, it must be done by the people. This is our responsibility, and we cannot escape it with the weak-kneed excuse "I don't know anything about it." If we understand the Bible and the Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights, then we know a great deal about the arts as well, for I believe they are as firmly based in the simple precepts of right and wrong — and of common sense! — as some of their more earthbound cousins.

"The modern work of art," says Sir Herbert Read, leading art critic, "is a symbol . . . the symbol, by its nature, is only intelligible to the initiated." In my humble opinion, rubbish! There are paintings turned out by the thousand, no doubt about it, which are totally unintelligible to the public; and perhaps a few of them would make excellent designs for Turkish rugs. But works of art? Never! One of the prime requisites of greatness in art is to be easily understood. It is fashionable to claim that the rash which broke out on the

face of the art world a quarter of a century ago will soon turn into a rosy glow, and that the public will embrace abstract art after its originators are dead. Look at the French impressionists and their contemporaries, say the critics; they were never appreciated in their day. This famous group of painters, however, were doing the most extreme type of work ever known during a time, the Victorian age, which we now regard as probably the most conservative in history. Under these extraordinary circumstances it is hardly surprising that some of the Impressionists were not recognized by the people. But does this mean that the people are incapable of appreciating great art without professional assistance? If you are the kind of person who can enjoy a symphony of Beethoven or a novel of Tolstoy or a piece of sculpture by Rodin without the help of footnotes, then you can enjoy a great painting as well, even though it happens to be a little new to you. Did Michelangelo need interpreters, with the Pope begging for his services? Or Raphael, when at his death at thirty-seven all Rome flocked to see his body lying in state beside the unfinished *Transfiguration*? Or Rubens, the ambassador, or Velasquez, companion of the King of Spain? It is generally the second-raters who must lean heavily on the critics for support.

THE MOST famous architect of our day, Frank Lloyd Wright, had something to say forty years ago to the American people concerning their responsibility to the arts.

"Even now," said he, "taking common sense into the holy realm of Art is shocking and . . . really dangerous to all academic circles. . . . Nevertheless, I believe every matter of artistic import which concerns good building may be put to the common sense of an American business man. Approached with common sense, the problems of art become childishly simple. Perhaps all too simple for those educated . . . beyond their capacity. . . ."

What in the world would those critics who admire artists who paint with their toes or out of sprinkling cans have to say about such bourgeois remarks? Art for the public! Utterly impossible, I can hear Sir Herbert Read exclaiming. The public would never appreciate it — it's too good for them. And besides, the American people don't like artists anyway. Says Gian-Carlo Menotti, the Italian composer of *The Saint of Bleecker Street*, "It is my contention that the average American has little or no respect for the creative artist and is apt to consider him as an almost useless member of the community. The average American father still views with dismay the fact that one of his sons may choose to become a composer, writer, or painter."

Quite right, Mr. Menotti! But have you stopped to consider the reason why? May it not partially have to do with the fact that the profession of painting, at least, has esthetically, morally, and in certain quarters even politically become a thoroughly degenerate one?

WE AMERICANS are constantly accused of being so preoccupied with business and money-making that we have little time for the arts. Perhaps, indeed, there is an element of truth in these statements, and perhaps one of the very reasons that the art of painting has become such a shambles in this country is that we have not bothered to care about its standards — we have let them go by default. Whatever the case, I believe the diseases which infect the world of painting today — of obscurity, confusion, immorality, violence — are not confined either to this single art or even to the arts in general. These are the diseases which, if the disaster of dictatorship ever overtakes our fair country, will be a major cause of it, and since the germs exist in such a pure, unadulterated form in the realm of painting (as if they had been isolated and placed on a warm, moist canvas to multiply) I suggest with sincere deference that it is time we take a few minutes out of our busy lives and — do something about it! Ladies and gentlemen, form your own opinions concerning art. Don't be afraid to disagree — loudly, if necessary, with the critics. Stand up and be heard.

And when the high priests of criticism and the museum directors and the teachers of mumbo jumbo throughout the country suddenly begin to realize that you mean business, you will be astonished, in my humble estimation, how fast they will change their tune. After all, we live in a democracy, and we are often inclined to blame our politicians for having their ear too close to the ground as they listen for the voice of the people. But the only way in which they have managed to become successful politicians in the first place is by recognizing and respecting the opinions that gave them their jobs. The critics will be no different.

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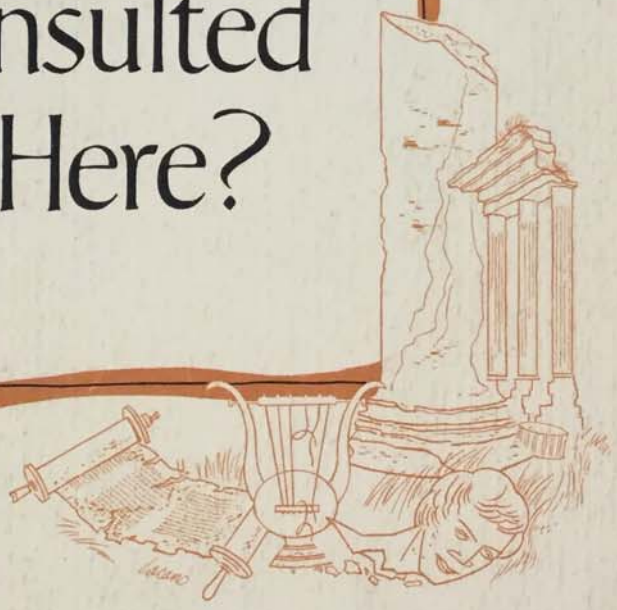
Hartford
Hartleigh

Has God Been Insulted Here?



Has God Been Insulted Here?

"What fire from heaven has passed this way? What tribunal has ordered salt to be strewn upon this dwelling? Has God been insulted here? Has France been betrayed?" HONORÉ DE BALZAC

By
HUNTINGTON HARTFORD

Privately printed
NEW YORK, 1951

HAS GOD BEEN INSULTED HERE?

" "No," Warden roared. "Goddam you, I said you'd have to make up your own goddam mind. I'm tired of making up everybody's goddam mind for them. They all come to me and want me to make up their goddam mind for them. From now on they can make up their own goddam mind. I'm sick and tired of it. I'm a first sergeant, not a goddam priest of God. . . ."

" "Well Jesus Christ!" Leva said stiffly. "Of all the goddam gall!" "

. . . . .

" "You better win," Prew said, "goddam you. I ain't had a piece of ass in almost a month."

" "No wonder you're pissed off," Angelo grinned. "I ain't had one since last payday. . . . Gimme a butt before I go."

" "Jesus Christ!" Prew said, pained, but he reached in his pocket and brought out one, a single tube, from the unseen pack. "Since when did I take you to raise!"

" "Whats a matter? You scared I'll steal your lousy tailormades? After I win I'll buy you a whole carton. Now match me and I'm gone."

" "Is your mouth dry?" Prew said. "You want me to spit for you?"

" "Not on the floor," Angelo said, raising his eyebrows in mock horror. "Not on the floor. Wheres your manners?"

" "Aint there something else I can do for you? Use my mouth as an ashtray? Cut off my balls and have a game of marbles? You oughta be able think of somethin." "

What a remark, what a remark! Let it be a warning to you, children, to give up smoking. By this time the reader must be aflame with curiosity concerning the source of this colorful language. A book about the Army? You guessed it! A little pornographic book sneaked under the cot for the

boys to peruse when they have been unable to find a woman for a month or two? Good heavens, no! Believe it or not, you have just been reading from the literary masterpiece of the twentieth century. If you are unconvinced, glance through the following reviews:

". . . definitely the work of a major novelist . . ." says John Marquand, the writer. ". . . it is in the realm of the impregnable."

". . . the best picture of Army life ever written by an American, a book of beauty and power . . . a work of genius," says the *Saturday Review of Literature*.

". . . bears comparison with the very best that is being done in American fiction today. . ." says the *New York Times*. "Make no mistake about it, *From Here to Eternity* is a major contribution to our literature."

* * * * *

So this represents the best that is being done in the American fiction of our day? When taught to them in our high schools, no doubt our children will eat it up—much more interesting than the tame and inhibited works of such earlier shockers as Swift or Rabelais. Yes, there is a lot of enthusiasm for vulgarity in our time, and the more vulgar a writer can be, the closer he is considered to the common man. And the better his reviews! Of course, when Faulkner wrote his famous best-seller, *Sanctuary*, about "the sinister and depraved figure of Popeye" (to quote the Modern Library jacket) he apologized that "to me it is a cheap idea because it was deliberately conceived to make money." But the critics thought him far too modest. He was hailed as he had never been in more conservative days.

On the other hand, there are still a few people who cling to the old-fashioned notion that there is a way of setting the "slice of life" before one's guest without causing him to vomit it up after dinner. Has it something to do with style, perhaps—or good taste? At any rate, it is obvious that the great writers of the past had the knack of it. Fielding, Balzac, Shakespeare—if these men had a way of handling crudity without

offense it was hardly because of a puritanical viewpoint or because the life of their day was less crude than that of our own. One seems to remember stories of pigs rolling in the gutter and a deathly and superstitious fear of water on the part of grown men in the early days of France and England. What, then, was the matter with Shakespeare—didn't he know the facts of life? Why didn't he put such expressions in the mouths of his characters as, "Do you ask him when it's time to take a crap?" and "It's no skin off my ass," to borrow once again from the aforementioned masterpiece. An ostrich with head in the sand, no doubt.

Or could it possibly be, one wonders, that in many of the twentieth century writers there is an aroma, not of healthy enjoyment of the bawdy side of life, but of a conscious effort to offend those of their readers who may still have an ounce of refinement and sensitivity in their souls? Could it be, perhaps, that the modern writer resents, bitterly resents, the mere idea of refinement as faintly indicative of a higher way of life than he himself has been enjoying?

What is the philosophy of *From Here to Eternity?* One finds it, perhaps, about a third of the way through the book: "He had only been a green kid but he had learned from all those pictures to believe in fighting for the underdog, *against the top dog*. He had even made himself a philosophy of life out of it."

If it is the ambition of the central character, Prew, to fight against the top dog, to attempt to drag him down to the level of the underdog (regardless of possible virtue) does he give a reason for his ambition? Why, certainly—the top dog is a dirty dog. To quote: "Because here in America, he thought, everybody fights to *become* top dog, and then to *stay* top dog." What a revolting ideal, the ideal upon which our country was founded! "And maybe, just maybe, that is why the underdogs that get to be top dogs and there is nothing left for them to fight for, wither up and die or else get fat and wheeze and die." Ah, there we have it: the picture of the fat, wheezy capitalist sitting on his money-bags and waiting patiently for the end.

And with what emotion is the battle to be fought? According to Prew: "All right. If they want to play, well we will play. Hate they like, hate they will get. We can hate as well as the next one. We were pretty good at it once, in our youth. We can bruise and burn and maim and kill

and torture, and call it kindliness and thoughtful discipline, just as subtly and intangibly as the next one. We can play the game of hates and call it free enterprise of competition between individual initiatives, too."

The game of hates, indeed. Is it by hate, then, that the artist (in the larger sense of the word) must depict his fellow man? Let us hope not. There is an old saying, "The world is what we make it." If the artist is the spokesman of mankind, as history has taught us, then one might modify it to, "The world is what the artist makes it." If he paints a picture of darkness, the world will be dark; a superficial one, it will become superficial; but if he paints all shades of the picture, the white as well as the black, then he will create a worthy standard of conduct for ordinary mortals to follow. "There is nothing either good or bad," says Shakespeare, "but thinking makes it so;" and if the artist believes that the world may some day turn out to be a good world instead of a bad, there is a fair probability of his wish coming true. How is he deciding this subject in our time?

The artist of our world is putting up what he believes to be a battle against the powers of darkness that are seeking to enshroud it. But in fighting back in the language of resentment and a cheap fatalism, to a great extent he has been swept along on the tide of misery. Because the line between poverty and tragedy has sometimes been so pathetically thin, he has tended to see in "the short and simple annals of the poor" little more than vulgarity and degradation and sudden death. Because it is often easier to be heard if you shout (no matter what you have to say), because the law of brute force is the only law that many men can understand, because it is more difficult to "see life steadily and see it whole" than to look at it with a neurotic and jaundiced eye, the modern artist has taken the path of least resistance toward the masses by screaming obscenities from the housetops. Engrossed with evil and the destruction of life to the point of seeing nothing but evil, he has wandered off to some streamlined inferno in which he has burned in effigy the normal people of the earth. Nor have the people always objected, for it is often interesting to watch the devil at work, and a good bonfire is fun to see, even if it happens to be your own spirit that is going up in flames.

A recent headline in the *New York Times* declared that our Supreme Court favored freedom of speech no matter how much unrest it might

cause. But there was a subtitle, too: "Minority Warns of Danger in Ruling." There is another danger: the danger that the artist, by means of that voice which was declared free by the highest court in our land to use such epithets as "slimy scum, snakes, bedbugs, and the like" on his fellow man in a public auditorium, may ride the wave of destruction till it engulfs the remainder of the world and himself with it.

An example has been given of modern literature. In our contemporary theatre what kind of inspiration to a younger generation is that drama which had the longest run of any on Broadway, *Tobacco Road,* in which the father of a family of morons attempts to peddle off his harelip daughter for a sack of turnips? Must a playwright—whose name smacks of better things—depict a heroine in a play called *A Streetcar Named Desire* in the original version of which she was carried screaming from the stage in a straightjacket? Must that branch of the theatre known as the ballet, whose very name was once synonymous with charm and grace, be hacked to death in that dance macabre known as *Fall River Legend* by the young murderess Lizzie Borden? On picking up a program at one of the performances of this ballet, one came across the phrase "the resolutions and passions of ordinary life." Was this, then, ordinary life in Fall River; was it customary in that town for a young girl, when under the influence of resolution and passion, to kill her father and stepmother with an axe?

Will the time come once again when man will walk away from a work of art with a sense of elation instead of despair, of communion with a higher being and a conception of reality larger than life rather than a feeling that life has been reduced to its lowest common denominator, with a sense of understanding which all the logic of science can never teach him?

And the great composers of our age—must they continue to allow their voices to be drowned out by the bloody screams of the hordes of anarchy? Overwhelmed by the increasing confusion and disaster of the world, the modern composer speaks in the language of confusion instead of his own. Oh, yes, there is music in a lighter vein such as the operettas of Franz Lehar in the early part of the century and such American classics as *Oklahoma* and *South Pacific* which approaches the glorious melody of other days. But almost all of that work which ought to be

great has been spoiled by the injection of horrid sounds which seem more like the noises of a factory in operation than a serious attempt at composition. Perhaps, indeed, it is actually a factory which the composers have been trying to depict—or at least the voice of the human race singing in chorus with the cacophony of the machine. Perhaps, following the example of a Prokofieff or a Shostakovitch when composing for the spirit if not the official program of their state, they have been trying to project a philosophy of disorganization into their music.

At any rate, most serious composers have been so engrossed in the production of music in "unfamiliar idioms," as they have been called, that they reap the harvest of unfamiliarity at the music stores. The people refuse to be "educated." The critics are more easily influenced, however; and even some of our great musical figures seem to have been taken in by the hocus-pocus which the wand of their fellow artist has been waving in the air. Of a certain modern symphony a world famous conductor made the statement that it was the first truly great orchestral work to be produced in America. Apparently the critics greeted this work with a round of applause. But to many ordinary people it is such atonal and tuneless hullabaloo as this, such a musical dust storm labelled with meaningless phrases like "the bleak and barren expanses of western Kansas" or "the long patience of the poor" (they would need all their patience for this) which drives the average man farther and farther from the kind of music the composer is trying to promote, back into the arms of jazz.

Speaking to the heart rather than the mind, music is a form of expression with which it is less easy to fool the layman than with pictures or even with words. If it proves impossible to give him the kind of education that he needs, if the songs to which he listens fail to touch his heart, then he will turn his back on education entirely, and once again it will be the primitive drums of the rumba and the wailing horns of jive and the jazz age which he will seek. The downbeat of tin pan alley has the merit, at least, (which can hardly be said for its more distinguished contemporaries) of appeal to the senses. With the passing of Verdi and Wagner and Tchaikowsky, with the artistic death of Richard Strauss in 1911 and possibly Stravinsky himself as early as 1913, it seems that the freezing blast of the ice age of art has killed off almost the last of the great composers.

What has happened to the painter of the modern world? Where is the Raphael of the sixteenth century or the Rubens of the seventeenth; where, indeed, is the Cézanne or Van Gogh of the nineteenth? The painter of the twentieth century, more than the worker in any other of the fine arts, has become the slave rather than the master of his environment. Not dealing in words, in which the absence of moral values must at least be questioned if not condemned, nor in music, which is so quickly rejected by the listener if not imbued with an unconscious morality of its own, the painter, hardly realizing what is happening to him, has become little more than the fashionable author of a peep show to amuse the sophisticated and shock the ignorant. If he is not designing jewellery or stocking ads for slick magazines, then he is doing posters for the left wing party of his country; if he is not discovering an art in the swift movement of flashlights before a camera, then he is turning out great indecipherable murals on the rape of the working class, or, according to the title of a recent picture, laying out "costume designs for a paranoiac ballet."

When he settles down to the use of that malleable combination of brush, oils, and the daily scene which the great artist has found sufficient for the translation of emotion to the canvas, what does he think of the wild and wooly result which he has obtained? Does he have a philosophy, and if so, is it as confused as the crazy quilt of his art might indicate? "There is no abstract art," declares Picasso, and then paints a lozenge and calls it the portrait of his mistress, and a group of packing cases the portrait of his father. How abstract can art be? "It is not what the artist does that counts, but what he is," says the founder of cubism. But in the next breath ". . . he is only a trifling bit of the world." If not in the artist, then, in whom does Picasso believe? "There ought to be a dictatorship of painters, a dictatorship of one painter," so he once stated, "to suppress all those who have betrayed us, to suppress the cheaters, to suppress the tricks, to suppress mannerisms, to suppress charm, to suppress history, to suppress a heap of other things." A dictatorship of one painter, indeed! To tell the truth, Picasso has come very close to achieving his ambition in the world of modern art.

Or take Dali, another Spaniard, who by means of such antics as jumping through the window of a well known department store has made himself perhaps the best known artist in America. His philosophy? *Blood*

Is Sweeter than Honey, he titled one of his pictures; and another, *Myself at the Age of Ten When I Was the Grasshopper Child*. Is there a meaning here? A biographer of Dali has declared that "Like so many artists of our century, he has remained deeply in love with his own childhood." Is the real truth, perhaps, that this love of childhood turns out to be no more than a hatred of the adult world which he constantly appears to ridicule? And another title: *Debris of an Automobile Giving Birth to a Blind Horse Biting a Telephone*. Does the biographer have an explanation for this, too? Indeed he has. Solemnly he explains in his pamphlet that the automobile is here given the ability to reproduce not itself but the horse, which releases its fury at modern civilization by biting a telephone. Is it not time, perhaps, that civilization bites back?

In this gallery of grasshopper children and packing case fathers, where is the simple human being who once sat for a portrait—is it from the head of this forgotten man that the snake-like ideas of a Medusa have sprung? "Is this the thing the Lord God made and gave to have dominion over sea and land; to trace the stars and search the heavens for power; to feel the passion of eternity?"

God forbid that man has become the twisted and tortured creature that the artist has sought to make him out. Tragic, if you will, in a tragic world; but in the very tragedy of a soul there is kindled a beauty, an overwhelming pity almost akin to religion, in the soul of the observer. Where is the beauty of contemporary art; what light except the bonfire of violence has been kindled in the breast of the modern artist? Without question his ambitions to help the poor and downtrodden and to attack the forces of entrenched wealth and power have degenerated (perhaps without his actual knowledge) into a creeping paralysis of jealousy which threatens to destroy not only the enemy but the very heart and soul of mankind.

* * * * *

In what manner have the noble ideals of the thinkers of our own country become so perverted? Due to modern communications and a form of government in this "land of opportunity" which permits one to say almost anything he wishes in the press, the cause of the downtrodden —and every other conceivable cause—has been aired to an extent never

before known. So far so good—and yet a great many of the pleas of those in need have not been heard.

There are a few sour notes in this chorus of appeal, a few rotten apples in the barrel which threaten to destroy all the good will which the radio and the newspaper and other means of communication familiar to democracy have established. The voice of the malcontent is loud. Of course, it is hardly possible for him to come out into the open and declare before the world, "I'm jealous." To a large extent the very men whom he envies started life under conditions no better or perhaps worse than his own, and he will hardly have the courage to come forward and say what he is thinking: "You have wealth and prominence. Why should it be you instead of me?" If he honestly wants help, if he is poverty-stricken or a cripple or the victim of some unfortunate chain of events, then he can be sure that he will receive consideration and sympathy—and rightly so—from his fellow men. But in many cases he knows in his heart that the world will be inclined to reply, "You are living in a country as free as any in history. Though we are far from perfect, we are trying to provide help for the needy, hospitals for the diseased; but if you continue to go astray for no other reason than a refusal to adjust yourself to society, then we will do everything in our power to set you on the right path; but only so far can we accompany you." This is not, as has been callously said, a world of the survival of the fittest; yet if it grow to be a world of the survival of the weak at the expense of the strong there will come a time when civilization will topple of its own weight.

But when this malcontent, unable to accomplish anything on his own, associates himself with a group of those in genuine need—*whatever group it may be*—he can appear to show an interest not only in his own welfare but that of others. Thus affording the appearance of morality to a point of view which might otherwise seem a purely selfish one, the voice of the parasite acquires a new strength from the power and prestige of a host. With a natural tendency, then, for the group to be overrun by such a bloodthirsty clan, before long it includes not only those in real need—the poor, the aged, the underprivileged (who lend an air of righteousness to the new cause)—but also the cranks of society—gamblers and drunkards who have never done a good day's work in their life, criminals who blame their crime on poverty or an unhappy child-

hood instead of attempting to correct it, all those who believe in the philosophy of something for nothing, all who revel in confusion, bloodshed, death.

It is not long before the malcontents of a group which used kindness and aid to the underdog as a reason for existence have become so powerful that already they can throw off the simple and spiritual point of view to which they once gave lip service. Casting aside pretense like the cape with which some wily magician cloaks his tricks, their ultimate aim of evil and destruction suddenly appears in full view. From the glorification of the poor to whom they have hitched their star, these malcontents have now acquired sufficient strength for the degradation of the rich; and whether they like it or not, the good people upon whom they have bestowed their kiss of death must go along with them. The dangerous import of such a bold reversal of morality is the fact that the bloodshed and tyranny which it exalts are often popular with the masses, for they appeal to that animal instinct in us all which, no matter how the forces of good may try to submerge it, has never been far from the surface.

The artist, as spokesman of the world, has been seized upon to express such perversion. It has always been a function of the artist to speak for his fellows. In dealing with a human being, the scientist can see him only as a compound of chemicals, the mathematician as a number, the politician a vote, the churchman as an unearthly creature incapable of wrongdoing. But the artist speaks for the average man, and being the most generous and gullible of souls, he is most easily persuaded to go to any extreme for a cause which appears to help the underdog. Speaking on his own behalf, too, he is frequently in a mood to justify bitterness and revolt regardless of the consequences; for when talented at all in many cases the most talented of any professional, he is often the least appreciated.

Jealousy is as cruel as the grave, says the Bible; but it is such cruelty which the modern artist quickly adopts when it is handed to him by those malcontents to whom it has grown to the proportions of a career. Almost before he realizes it, the artist has becme the spokesman for a destructive minority whose very peace of mind ultimately depends on revolution and anarchy. The artist, the great artist, if he exists, has for the first time in history lost that quality of creative growth of which among the workers

of the world he has always been the symbol, and has taken on the blank face of despair. Time must have a stop, says the modern writer. Let us hope that time will have no such stop as the world has come to expect of it, but instead will stretch out into that eternity which until recent years has suggested vague and wonderful dreams incapable of being catalogued except under that equally vague and indeterminate heading known as faith. Faith! Of all things on earth that the artist must possess, is it not faith? Will he ever regain it?

The artist has attempted to draft the forces of violence not only as a threat to his enemy but as a bloody cross upon which to hold up the body of suffering humanity to view. There is no question that it is the part of the spokesman of humanity to inform his fellow men of those sluggish creatures of wealth and power which he finds lying across the straight and narrow vision of his path. But though there is much to be condemned in modern civilization, though the artist may be bitterly convinced of the indifference of society to the ailments of the unfortunate, still by his ferocious attempts upon the life of the fatted calf he may well have overlooked the important fact that it is capable of giving milk—the milk of human kindness. What social equality and happiness can he expect from the blood-spattered altar upon which he places the gory body of his dedication?

No one will deny that the modern world abounds in tragedy; on every side it is brought to our attention. But the very fact that the world is more keenly aware than ever of its ills should be a prime cause, not of despair, but of the greatest hope and rejoicing. Enabled for the first time in history to understand the true nature of the fierce problems with which he has always grappled, man has at last reached a point where he has a chance to conquer them.

No hurt I did not feel, no death
That was not mine; mine each last breath
That, crying, met an answering cry
From the compassion that was I.
All suffering mine, and mine its rod;
Mine, pity, like the pity of God.

In that beautiful poem known as *Renascence,* Edna St. Vincent Millay has provided a magnificent reply to the gloomiest prognosticators of our race. She who burned her candle at both ends because it gave such a lovely light was little mourned at her recent death in return for the heartbreak which she laid at the feet of mankind. But in the core of that very despair to which she gives such heartrending voice she has discovered a keynote of hope which, undeterred by the timidity of lesser souls, she has not hesitated to sing side by side with the angels of the Most High.

Yes, it is quite true—and let us thank God that the bogey-men of superstition and ignorance are being laid to rest—that there is no longer escape from the horrors of the darkest, most obscure corner of the earth—or of the human mind. John Donne said it in another way three hundred years ahead of his time: "No man is an island." From now until the edge of doom the world is to be one world, and it is no more possible to ignore the screams of the dying on the plains of Korea than to leave your neighbor, struck down by a heart attack, lying helpless in the street before your house. If little Kathy Fiscus falls down a hole in the middle of a meadow, there are a thousand men to volunteer to pull her out and ten million to anxiously await the outcome of the tragedy in the morning paper. Should a meek, scrawny little man named Gandhi start a hunger strike in a straw hut in far-off India, the great British Empire rocks to its foundations and a hundred million Indians pray to the gods of fire and the sun to save the life of their leader. If the atom bomb strikes at Nagasaki, the reverberation of the mighty explosion is heard many a year after the longest and bitterest chain reaction of nuclear fission has once again passed into the elements from which it has been torn.

The modern world, like the pictures which the astronomers take of its more formidable rivals in space, may well appear to be one great burning ball of tragedy. But in the paean of despair which Edna St. Vincent Millay has sung as "reaching up her hand to try, she screamed to feel it touch the sky," there is a postscript which apparently escaped the notice of the army of strong men influenced by her impassioned song. The brief mention of that Deity without whose inspiration she would perhaps never have bothered to write such a poem, is not inconsistent, as the modern poet might be inclined to believe, with such a chorus of rebirth. If indeed the poetess has occasion to speak of hate in her song, it

is a hate which through the catharsis of a fine soul has emerged not as itself but as "pity, like the pity of God." At the end of her poem does she not write:

The world stands out on either side
No wider than the heart is wide;
Above the world is stretched the sky—
No higher than the soul is high.
The heart can push the sea and land
Farther away on either hand;
The soul can split the sky in two,
And let the face of God shine through.

With the voice of misery and violence echoing in ever widening circles to the ends of the earth, in what manner shall the artist answer back? Shall he tell the people of their impotence, of the cruel indifference of the universe, of the absence of the slightest indication that the God in whom they once placed so much faith has ever walked the trail which they are following? Shall he run by night, with the psychiatrist, and in violating the graves of the mind fling it back to infancy? Shall he issue a manifesto, looking through the tortured and twisted glass of his vision till the poverty and confusion of thousands become the revolution of the world?

No, it is not by fear and sleight of hand that he conquers, but by a simpler method; the method of a Man Who was once called the Prince of Peace. Painting a picture for all the world to see, it is within the power of the artist, more than most human beings, to provide the revelation of a great example. But it is by the pure and gentle colors, not the flashy ones, that he beguiles men into looking at the work which he has done. How shall we conquer? In the words of Iole, "When I behold Theseus, I desired that I might see him offer battle, or at least guide his horses in the chariot race; but Hercules did not wait for a conquest; he conquered whether he stood, or walked, or sat, or whatever he did."

To look backward for a fleeting moment at the much despised Victorian era might do less harm than the artists of our day believe. What is the saying, "A little child shall lead them?" There was a man named Charles Dickens, one cannot help recalling, who wrote a great deal about children. There was a boy named David Copperfield, and

Oliver Twist, and a number of others—a far cry from the lad in motion pictures who poisons his father or the girl in the legend of Fall River who murders her mother with an axe. Then there was a little girl called Alice some half a century ago who went down a rabbit hole and landed in a strange and unrealistic world which somehow has seemed very real to the children—and adults too—who have read about her adventures ever since. And a boy named Jim Hawkins who successfully managed to vanquish his foes on a far-off place called Treasure Island; and a boy named Mowgli, living proof that the law of the jungle could be every bit as just and honorable as that of the Man Pack. And there was Peter Pan—lovable, elfish Peter Pan, who could not quite get the hang of living, and preferred the never-never land of pirates and Indians. Can it indeed be true, as reported, that when the life of the invisible Tinker Bell is in danger and the hard-boiled modern audience at the current showing of the play is asked to save her by crying that they believe in fairies, they pour out their hearts in a resounding chorus of "We do, we do!"?

Yes, the writers of these stories for children had a most unrealistic—if you like, an escapist—attitude toward the world in which they lived. But can one say that such stories are less alive today than on the morning when they were first published? Why, then, have such old-fashioned and juvenile works remained so popular, not only with the children for whom they were written, but with so many adults (in the best sense of the word) of our day? The answer is not far to seek: because they deal with the triumph of good over evil in such a way that Tom, Dick, and Harry can understand it, and above all, because instead of setting up goodness in the next alley for the sadistic pleasure of using it as a target, they are interested in goodness for its own sake. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," said Keats at the beginning of the nineteenth century; and a few years later a man named Matthew Arnold—who had sour moments, too, when the subject of "Philistines and barbarians" happened to come up—had much to say of sweetness and light.

"A little child shall lead them." Joan of Arc was not much more than a child when she led the armies of her native land against the enemy. Perhaps it is only the simplicity and innocence of such as she that is capable of the task at hand.

A tremendous task it is!—the regeneration of the spiritual life of our

times. Among all classes and walks of people, the burden of this responsibility falls most weightily upon the shoulders of the artist. A great wrong has been done the artist of the contemporary world. He it is whose heart beats for the truly poor and hungry and downtrodden, the ones whose voices are too gentle or too proud for a cause dedicated to no other purpose than the destruction of others. But the quiet calls of those in need have been drowned out by the catcalls of those who pretend to be their friends, and it is to these only that the artist has learned to listen. Once again he must put his ear to the earth and wait patiently for the voice of the needy. If he waits long enough the sounds of battle will die away, and once again he will be in tune with the inner spirit that he is seeking.

Of all the great works which have been handed down to us by the master craftsmen of the ages, it is perhaps the work of the artist that we would be most unwilling to relinquish. Why, some may ask, is one so concerned with the relation of the artist to the tough and self-sufficient world in which we live? What has art to do with the average man?

Art, without exaggeration, has everything to do with him, for it is the work of the artist, the greater or the lesser, with which he comes face to face at every turn of his existence. If he is depressed and seeks that solace in which he is sure to find the deepest understanding, does he not turn to the world of music, to the peals of Beethoven or the hillbilly songs of Kentucky, to the rumba band at the nearest juke box or the strains of the organ in church on Sunday morning? If he seeks to improve his mind, or even to amuse it for a few hours without improving it, does he not go to the latest best-seller, the magazine, the radio? If he seeks that which to the Chinese is worth a thousand words, a picture; if he looks out his window at the view for which he paid so much in the purchase of his home; if he likes to watch the excitement of a city street; if he goes to the movies; if he prefers the photographs which decorate our world on all sides—the magazine covers, the billboards, the shop windows—is he not at every turn the tourist in a great museum of art for which there is no entrance fee?

We are all art critics, little or great; and those who turn up their noses at the world of art are turning them up at life itself. Art was never the narrow grave on which the intellectual snobs laid flowers on the one

hand and the masses reverently avoided on the other. Art is an expression of the people, by the people, for the people; and in other centuries the music of the great composers was great because if you listened carefully, you could hear the heartbeat of the crowd in the distance.

Yes, the man who walks by a shop window on his way home, or stares at the ads in the subway, or looks with a pleased eye at the garden in front of his house—that man is a critic of art; and how foolish of him to say, "I have nothing to do with art. I don't know anything about it." In making such a statement, is he not leaving himself open to as much criticism as the man who says, "I don't know anything about democracy because I've never read the Constitution," or "It doesn't matter to me what happens to the country. Politicians are all crooks," or "I made my own way in the world with nobody's help, not even Uncle Sam's." How quickly would he change his tune if there were a knock on his door early one morning and he was suddenly carried off, never again to be heard from! And so with that critic, the average man. If he reads of so much murder in the papers that he comes to think of murder as justifiable, if his children see criminals glorified in the comic strips to the point where they can laugh at crime, if the motion pictures continue to depict such a superficial world that the salesman and the bookkeeper and the farmer grow to believe in such a world rather than the one in which they live, then the mind of the average man will deteriorate as surely as his body in the barbed wire enclosure of a concentration camp.

It is just such deterioration of the mind, let us not forget, which leads to that mentality of which the police state consists. Whether or not the average man is fully conscious of the importance of the artist, the artist must once again become conscious of the responsibility which he bears. Instead of speaking for an embittered and frustrated minority, he must once again speak in such a way that people in all walks of life will honor and respect him. The work of art was and should again be the open forum in which all sides of a subject are discussed, with the conclusions of the artist definitely placing the right in the position of right, the wrong in the position of wrong, with no chance for men in brown shirts or black to twist his meaning to their own perverted ends. The artist, where he is sincere, is indeed the truest of all judges in the problems of daily life. If he does not hand down a fair decision to the man in the street, if he

loads the scales of justice for the benefit of one side or the other, then that court which is perhaps the court of final appeal—the work of art—is no longer of value, and there is no place to which man can turn for a solution of his problems. Only chaos is left, and it is among the weeds of such a neglected garden that the full flower of dictatorship will spring.

HUNTINGTON HARTFORD

MEMORANDUM

To:

From: ELIZABETH SHAW

Date:

Subject:

Background

file
Huntington Hartford

Press) - Mr. Huntington Hartford, scion of one of America's
press campaign in six New York papers yesterday, developed
f action of his crusade aiming at the correction of the "moral
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he article has after all an educational purpose."
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merica today, it must be by the people.

"My article was previously published by the American Mercury, but such a magazine is not read widely enough to get real action. It has a circulation of only about 120,000 and is read in New York itself by not more than some 20,000 people, while the newspapers which carried my article yesterday have a total circulation of more than 4,300,000.-

"I think that it is necessary to make personnel changes at the direction of the Museum of Modern Art, the New York Times and Art News so as to eliminate the baneful influence these institutions have at present on American opinion. Another thing needed is a broad educational campaign that would be opposed to the extreme directions in art and the theatre."

Mr. Hartford, who operates a successful model agency in New York received his formal education at Harvard. While in college he eloped with Mary Lee Epling, the daughter of a prominent West Virginia surgeon. The marriage ended in divorce in 1939.

In 1949, Mr. Hartford married Marjorie Steele, a young dramatic student from San Francisco. She scored recently a great artistic success in the London production of "Sabrina Fair" playing the part of Sabrina.

File
Huntington Hartford

C O P Y

By Paul Mocsanyi

New York, May 17 (United Press) - Mr. Huntington Hartford, scion of one of America's greatest fortunes, who started a press campaign in six New York papers yesterday, developed today in an interview the plan of action of his crusade aiming at the correction of the "moral and artistic degeneration in modern art, contemporary theatre and in a general way among the intelligentsia in the USA and particularly in New York."

The article that opened the crusade, was published in form of full page paid advertisement in the New York Times, the New York Herald Tribune, the Daily News, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Journal American and the New York Post. The aggregate cost of these advertiseme is $25,000.

"They won't cost me anything, of course" said Mr. Hartford with a smile "for I'll deduct the money from my income tax. The article has after all an educational purpose."

The main point of Mr. Hartford is that "if anything is to be done to halt the downward trend of esthetic standards in America today, it must be by the people.

"My article was previously published by the American Mercury, but such a magazine is not read widely enough to get real action. It has a circulation of only about 120,000 and is read in New York itself by not more than some 20,000 people, while the newspapers which carried my article yesterday have a total circulation of more than 4,300,000.-

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In 1949, Mr. Hartford married Marjorie Steele, a young dramatic student from San Francisco. She scored recently a great artistic success in the London production of "Sabrina Fair" playing the part of Sabrina.

"Some of the worst influences come from certain groups of the New York intelligentsia," Mr. Hartford said. "The book reviewers of the leading papers, for instance. There there is Mr. Brooks Atkinson, drama critic of the New York Herald Tribune, Mrs. Aline Saarinen and Mr. Stuart Preston from the art department of the New York Times." Mr. Hartford thinks that Howard Devrees first art critic of the New York Times would be much more amenable to his point of view, but "he is obviously under pressure of some kind that makes it difficult for him to write what he thinks."

Mr. Hartford also thinks that it is equally important to "effectuate changes at such intellectual magazines as Harper's Magazine, Saturday Review and the Atlantic Monthly.

"Unfortunately most of the bad influence comes from the radical personal believes of playwrites and authors. It is a public scandal that a play like Tennessee Williams' "The Cat on the Hot Tin Roof" was given the Pulitzer Prize, or that the New York Times book reviewer called James Jones' book "From Here to Eternity" the greatest American novel."

Asked for a statement on Mr. Hartford's article and interview, Dr. Alfred Frankfurter, Editor and Publisher of Art News declared:

"I question whether it is ethical for a great newspaper to accept advertising from a person without professional training and background that contains personal attacks at the integrity and competence of people widely known and respected in their profession.

"I question whether it is fair to use tax deductible money for such purposes and whether the Internal Revenue Bureau will accept this as a suitable means.

"If such practice is accepted it might lead to irresponsible attacks on Universities, the Press and even at Religion in exactly the same way."

end.

cc: Elizabeth Shaw

June 2, 1955

Dear Mr. Mocsanyi:

Many thanks for your letter. I am delighted to have the copy of the United Press dispatch concerning your Hartford interview. I was shocked to hear from another source that Hartford has in his collection the work of a notorious communist, Gustave Courbet.

Incidentally, it seems to me that in connection with Hartford's attacks on modern painting; art critics, etc. it would be relevant to mention that his wife is a painter of rather conservative style as well as an actress.

Sincerely,

Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

Mr. Paul Mocsanyi
United Press Associations
220 East 42nd Street
New York, New York

AHB:ma

cc: Elizabeth Shaw

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New York, New York

AHB:sm

MEMORANDUM

To: ~~Alfred H. Barr, Jr.~~

From: ~~:~~ **ELIZABETH SHAW**

Date: Jan. 22, 1959

Subject:

We decipher the envelope/
as belonging to a firm
called Balfour Guthrie & Co., Ltd.
72 Wall Street.

Thanks!
AHB

NEW YORK 5, N.Y. JAN 21 330PM 1959

WALL STREET STATION 15 FOR LIQUENET U.S. POSTAGE 4c

Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.,
New York.

.....

odern Art
11 W. 53rd St.
New York.

Director and Board:

How could you, right in the middle of my plans for an exhibition hall of ironing board techniques. . .

F. Gallery
Fred Gallery, Pres.
GALLERY'S LAUNDRY.

cc: Landry Gallery
712 Fifth Ave.

.....

Museum of Modern Art
11 W. 53rd.
NYC

Board of Directors, greetings:

You are snobs, stupid, horrid snobs! Spotlight my activities, will you!

Harvey Madison
Harvey Madison,
MADISON'S SQUARE GARDENS
(for city apartments)

Hacker + Co Ltd
[redacted]
NEW YORK 5, N. Y.

72 Wall Street

NEW YORK 5, N.Y. JAN 21 330PM 1950

Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.,
New York.

Personal.
ATTN: M. Rene d'Harnoncourt

.....

Museum of Modern Art
11 W. 53rd St.
New York.

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MADISON'S SQUARE GARDENS
(for city apartments)

Liz - Seen by Rd H

"A Series of Letters, 1959"
(Museum of Modern Art versus Gallery of Modern Art)

.....

Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd Street,
New York City.

To the Director and the Board of the Museum:

You fools! You greedy fools! Crush my plans, will you! What's to become of my family and me now?

"Arthur"
Arthur, the Modern Chef
Creator of:
MODERN ART'S MUSEUMBURGER

.....

Museum of Modern Art
11 W. 53rd St.
New York.

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MADISON'S SQUARE GARDENS
(for city apartments)

.....

Mrs Shaw

news from the art world

MAURICE GEO. KLYNE, A.S.L. C.A.
Contemporary Art Expert
225 West 39 St., Suite 901
Telephone: PEnnsylvania 6-6264-5

Get a loada this!
dB
—page 3

AS A MATTER OF EXPLANATION

February 2, 1959

As a matter of explanation. In order to have as little confusion as possible, as to the purpose of this letter. We have for the past 6 months brought news from the Art world to the attention of the working press. Emphasizing that Artists are human, they have problems and have as many rights as any other member of our contemporary society. Since it has been the press who perverted the public's attitude toward the artist, by such farmed out phrases as "A hair from insanity", "Political radicals" and many other such cute interpretations of the brotherhood of Artists, thus making the earning of a decent living for the artist pretty much a rat race.

With our darted pen we have been evening the score, by putting biting remarks in print and heading the whole thing in the direction of newspeople who have heretofore judged the value of the artist by such authenticated nonsense as a LUST FOR LIFE, a bastardized version of the artist Vincent Van Gogh and a MOON & SIXPENCE guaranteed not to be based on the life of Paul Gaughin, both who lived way in the past and are certainly not good illustrations of an Artist who has to live in this century.

-more-

True, many people don't like our approach. We approach our effort in the style of the newspaper correspondent or columnist. A formatted attitude sloughed by no less than papa Winchell who has a vast audience who obviously enjoy character butchering and personality assassination. This is the first compliment we have afforded the keyhole peeper. Thus, with method as the approach those who just entered into our orbit of correspondence will understand why our work seems more like a columnist than that of an Art Expert.

Talking about Art expert, we are informed Mr. John Myers, not related to the philanthropist Dr. John Myers, seems to feel there ain't no such thing as an Art Expert.. 'Tis funny in lieu of the fact that Mr. Myers so fondly refers to himself as one. And with the talent he has on the walls I am inclined to agree with him. Mrs. Bertha Schaefer's people always (Employees) always awed this desk by their "Who cares?" attitude, after a few views of Mrs. Schaefer, they must be suffering from the shock of her. Mrs. Claire Blauvelt, Secretary of the Catherine Lorriade Society and the most recent national director of the American Art Week, is ill with a throat problem. Dr. Boylan Fitz-Gerald, politically involved with Art organizations, seems to have problems on his hands with the younger group of the National Arts Club, finding alliance with such people as James Johnson Sweeny.

Now ain't it nice to discover that Marie Torre a Television correspondent for the Herald Tribune, knows what it is

to be in the hoosgow. 10 days makes her a criminologist no less. Huntington Hartford won himself an editorial in the New York Daily Mirror with the editorial writer, right in the principle of defending the right of Mr. Hartford to use the word "Modern Art" in the title of his purported museum.(We hope it will come to pass.) Now all they have to do is to use the same principle of the right to use a word as it applies to their tiny night club correspondent who has a tantrum every time some one uses the word Confidential... We think Mr. Mortimer was delightful and should be condoned for his fine write on Gigi Durston, a subject we agree on.

Governor "Rock Em To Sleep" Rockefeller is playing real foxy in his bid to make the Rockefeller dream come true, as far as we can gather from our rather complicated examination of the subject the disapproval of Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona and other major conservatives, will bring in the labor vote. Seems the next move in the millionaire house, to move in the direction of fellow coordination of the millionaire for president move is up to the Fords, who will come in late in the deal.

A world of people watch with horror as Fidel Castro liberator of Cuba, turns into as much a butcher as his predecessor. While the riddance of dictators is certainly appreciated in the United States, blood baths after the victory seems so primitive since cruelty usually becomes as much a lust as money. Khanzada the dancer, did a portrait of Fidel Castro, before his victory. It portrayed as a man of courage liberating his country from a butcher.. We certainly hope Mr. Castro will live up to her interpretation of him....

-more-

Claire Luce the actress has just done a series of concerts in which she interprets love from the classics. This has been quite successful and she plans to do a series for Broadway or off Broadway this season. We have been told her performances are warm and exciting. Miss Luce by the way is quite an excellent professional painter. Ditto for Hollywood's Claudette Colbert..

We have already heckled the Art press for its inadequate, unfair and skimpy coverage of the Art profession. We have wondered editorially why they can without seeing pass up the various rackets in the Art profession. A critic, is not only destined to give with wisdom, but to as well lay the cornerstone for a better and more exciting profession, clearing the way for the next generation to represent their fathers and mothers with more interest and progress.. As a matter of explanation, we are for the Artist, and a clean profession. So, until next week,

I am, sincerely,

Maurice Geo. Klyne, A.S.L./C.A.
Contemporary Art Expert

For features, notes on personalities and News from the Art World, feel free to call. You can reprint any part, or all, of this newsletter.