

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

104
SPRING 1956

No. 51

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT of THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Museum of Modern Art's Department of Education was established in 1937 for a three-fold purpose: 1) to help meet the needs of children and adults seeking art for their personal satisfaction, 2) to promote among the general public an understanding of the value of creative art experience in every-day life, and 3) to stimulate the teaching profession in promoting art for the purpose of general education. In 19 years of active leadership in the education world, the Department of Education has undertaken the realization of these aims in a variety of ways. In New York, it operates an art school for children and adults the year around and, in cooperation with the Board of Education, services 50 New York City public high schools with visual teaching aids especially prepared for their teaching needs. In addition, exhibitions on its teaching methods are circulated among educational groups all over the country. The Department has also been active in promoting well-designed toys and art equipment for children and, for the amateur adult craftsman, it has published a series of three practical how-to-do-it books. Its annual Christmas Holiday Carnival has attracted more than 28,000 children to a specially installed workshop-gallery at the Museum, complete with small-sized painting easels, a variety of colored and textured materials with which to make mobiles, collages and constructions and imaginative toys and games with which to play. The Department has also produced two series of television programs on creative activities for young people and their parents and, for fourteen years, served as headquarters for the more than 1200 members of the National Committee on Art Education.

In 19 years the Department has grown from a tentative pilot project, staffed solely by a part-time director and his secretary to one of the largest of the Museum's departments. Under the direction of Victor D'Amico, it now employs five assistants in its offices and twenty-four trained teachers in its school.

Most flourishing of the many projects organized by the Department of Education is the world-famous People's Art Center, where classes for adults, young people and children are held throughout the year. Staffed by twenty-four experienced teachers, it has a current enrollment of 725 children and 550 adults who attend more than 77 daytime and evening classes.

The People's Art Center of today is the outgrowth of an experimental art center for war veterans, sponsored by the Museum during and just after the Second

more.....

World War. Here the Center's pioneering methods of teaching the amateur adult artist were first evolved in workshop classes for veterans as well as in special occupational therapy training courses for the Red Cross. In 1948 this specialized war-time service was converted into a school for the general public.

The major objectives of the People's Art Center are to provide creative opportunities which help not only the general growth of children but which also satisfy the leisure time interests of adults. Enrollment in children's classes at the People's Art Center is strictly by chronological age. No emphasis is placed on talent in the belief that growth in creative art expression is only a part of a child's general emotional and social development. The Museum's method of teaching children is informal and individual and is based on experienced knowledge of child development. Adults, on the other hand, are enrolled in classes according to their individual experience and choice. These classes are planned for amateurs only, to help them derive satisfaction from participating in a creative activity and not as formal training toward a profession. Among the many different courses offered to adults are painting criticism groups, workshops in ceramic and wood sculpture and jewelry making, courses in painting and drawing as well as the outdoor painting and sketching classes offered for the first time last summer on Long Island.

Since its beginning in 1948, the People's Art Center has been a leader in developing progressive methods of art education. Its famous orientation courses, planned for beginning adults who have never before had experience in any creative medium, were first used in the War Veterans' Art Center and have since been adopted by schools and art centers all over the country. In an orientation course, a student may try out a variety of media to discover which interests him most or for which he has most aptitude, and at the same time he receives a basic introduction to the fundamentals of art.

Always alert for new ways to extend its many and varied services to a greater public, the Education Department has from time to time sent out its own trained teachers to communities outside New York to lecture and consult on art programs in schools and local art centers. Now the Department is busy preparing for the establishment of a whole new art center in Northern New Jersey, to be staffed by Museum-trained teachers and planned to be similar to the Peoples' Art Center at the Museum. The Art Center of Northern New Jersey, as it is called, is still in the formative stage but funds are being raised now by a committee in Jersey for this project which will be the first of the Departments' extension services on such a large scale. If this first extension art center is successful, the Department hopes to develop

more.....

similar centers to serve other communities.

"Through the Enchanted Gate," the highly successful series of TV programs sponsored by the Museum is another way the Department of Education has brought to the attention of the public the methods of teaching and philosophy of art education in which it believes. Produced by Victor D'Amico and two instructors from the People's Art Center, the series was shown weekly over WNBT in 1952 and 1953. The first thirteen programs were addressed specifically to parents of young children to show them, through demonstrations of practical ideas and experiments, how they can aid the creative development of their children at home. During the second year the program was expanded in scope to include the entire family working together on creative art projects. This development was partly the result of the success of a new kind of art class seriously tried out for two years in the People's Art Center, a class where parents and their children could work together in creative activities. Later, "Through the Enchanted Gate" was translated into book form under the title ART FOR THE FAMILY, the first book ever published which is designed to further creative interests of the family as a group. Kinescope prints of the television series are available through the Museum's Film Rental Library to educators in all parts of the country.

One of the most popular events sponsored by the Education Department is the Childrens' Holiday Carnival of Modern Art held for six weeks every year at Christmas time. Since 1942, when it was first started, more than 28,000 children have come to the Carnival at the Museum to paint, make collages and constructions and to play with toys and games especially designed to introduce them to an enjoyment of color, texture and design on a level they can understand and in a way which involves their own active participation. Parents and educators, who are not allowed within the Childrens' Carnival, but who may stand outside and watch, have long been impressed with the great delight their children take in these imaginative activities and the unusual enthusiasm with which they work under the Carnival's trained supervisors. So popular has the Carnival been among New York City children that many museums and art centers in other parts of the country have adapted the idea for their own communities.

A special interest of the Education Department for many years has been the development of better designed toys and art equipment for children. Many of these new ideas are seen in actual use each year by children in the Holiday Carnival and several pieces of equipment, such as kits containing materials with which children

more.....

107

can make collages and constructions, and small-sized easels for young people have been produced by the Museum for public sale on an experimental basis. In addition the Department has organized from time to time exhibitions of newly designed children's toys, both experimental and mass-produced. In undertaking such projects, it is the Museum's purpose to stimulate public demand for their manufacture, rather than to go into the business itself.

In addition to its classes at the People's Art Center, the Education Department also carries on an extensive program to aid art education in New York City public high schools. Begun as an experimental project in 1937, this program is now largely financed by the Board of Education and services instructors in more than fifty city high schools with a variety of visual teaching aids. Designed specifically for the adolescent age group and tailored to meet the needs of a large school system, the Museum's stock of teaching aids includes portable teaching models in the fields of painting, architecture, interior design, industrial design, poster and advertising art; teaching portfolios on "The Elements of Design," "Modern Design in Furniture," and "Modern Painters;" and slide talks, some with recorded lectures, for example "New Forms of Our Time," "The Making of a Silk-screen Print," and "Modern Sculpture and Photography."

As a special service to public education, the Museum has offered free classes to elementary school teachers in New York City public schools. This provides in-service credit for the teachers and in many instances constitutes the only art training in the teacher's preparation. Approximately 100 teachers take advantage of these classes each year.

For the amateur artist who wants to work at home the Department also has published a variety of practical books such as "How to Make Pottery and Ceramic Sculpture," "How to Make Modern Jewelry," and "How to Make Objects of Wood."

In the Young People's Gallery, which is located on the Museum's first floor, the Department has installed special exhibitions for art educators as well as for the interested public. Here series of exhibitions have presented art work by children living in many different countries all over the world. Other exhibitions explain and illustrate techniques and principles of art education. Traveling exhibitions have been made in cooperation with the Committee on Art Education and have been circulated throughout the country.

In addition to its own exhibitions, members of the staff of the Department have

more.....

given valuable aid and counseling to other organizations engaged in art programs of their own. At New York Hospital, for instance, they helped to organize a program of creative activities for the children's wards, assembled exhibitions of art work by the hospital's young patients and designed special adjustable display equipment for their installation.

The Museum's Department of Education also serves as headquarters for the National Committee on Art Education and every year organizes and conducts a conference for its more than 1200 members from all over the country.