

1950

## Understanding Modern Art.

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UNDERSTANDING MODERN ART

by

John Kenneth Davis

An extensive term paper submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Education,  
in the Graduate School of the Central Washington  
College of Education

August, 1950

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Accepted: August, 1950

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Josephine Burley, CHAIRMAN

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Anne C. Lembesis

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E. E. Samuelson

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

The interpretations of modern art have been many and varied, but too often they are presented in terms as unfamiliar to the average person as abstract art is in itself.

Previous approaches to this problem have dealt generally with the visual interpretation of the moderns and their work with little enlightenment concerning the place of contemporary or unfamiliar art as a functional and material value in our everyday living.

This study was motivated by the Author's frequent experience of being questioned as to the everyday functional values of modern art and its purpose in relation to the betterment of individual and group living. The inability to present reasonable and concrete factors in a saleable capacity instigated a desire to conduct research in the interest of self enlightenment and the promotion toward a better understanding of our contemporary unfamiliar art. This leads directly into the problems of this study; how can society better understand modern art as a functional value in everyday living?

The importance of this question is two-fold. First, it is intended to direct an appeal for less prejudice and a more critical evaluation of unfamiliar art. This will be extended in the context of this paper through strategic points of view expressed by persons who have spent a good deal of their lives as interpreters of the relationship of

modern art to our contemporary culture.

A preview of the trend of the critics interpretation of modern art can be taken from Robert J. Wolff's article 'Unfamiliar Art in an Unfamiliar World'. He accepts the assumption that art is a mirror to the complexity of human existence and that our best exponents of contemporary art have challenged the unprecedented conditions of modern life. Wolff then produces this question for thoughtful provocation. Will the contemporary innovators be allowed to grow to vigorous maturity, or will they disappear under mass acceptance of familiar but outworn and irrelevant cultural patterns?<sup>1</sup>

His answer to this question is simple, direct and without complication and lies in the capacity of individual accomplishment. The answer, he states, is a need of our people to re-evaluate their environment and re-discover their roots. They need to realize that new works of art are mirroring their own world and own age. He concludes that in this way only will they come to identify the art of living with the imprint of a living culture.<sup>2</sup>

The preceding answer to bear recognition will require proof for it is not likely that an individual will accept even an 'authorities' statement as to his needs without himself knowing and believing they are necessary and relevant to his life.

Taking into consideration the above assumption it is likely that the second part of the problem, although of secondary importance,

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1. Wolff, Robert J., "Unfamiliar Art in a Familiar World", Magazine of Art, Vol. 39, 1946, Dec., p. 361
  2. Wolff, Robert J., op. cit., pp. 363-64



contributes a foundation to build upon in reaching a better understanding of modern art. To accomplish this it is necessary for the writer first to reach for an explanation of a key question involving the individual and his contemporary thought. The key question and first consideration is in this case, why is there frequently a tendency to dislike and distrust modern art? Then in turn, granted there are reasons, are they well founded, justified through study and critical evaluation or are they simply dislikes through lack of understanding of objectives, purposes and directions.

This could be taken with a grain of salt to the individual who is guilty of often repeated positive likes and dislikes without foundation. In a booklet put out by the Museum of Modern Art<sup>3</sup> there lies an illustration of intolerance. In the Museum these words are often heard, "it ought to be burned", or "there ought to be a law against it". Need it be said that Hitler often felt the same way and actually passed laws against it. Along with this he passed laws against liberty in politics, education and religion, Hitler crushed freedom in art. Why? Because the artist, perhaps more than any other member of society, stood for individual thinking.<sup>4</sup>

At this point there could easily be a misunderstanding as to the technical point of view involving the attitude that in a country dedicated to freedom and rights of man, should there not be a right of choice as to likes and dislikes?

3. Barr, Alfred H. Jr., What is Modern Painting, The Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1936, p. 6

4. Barr, Alfred H. Jr., op. cit., p. 6

Taylor<sup>5</sup> implies that there is no reason why the public should be dragooned to admire and applaud what they cannot understand. He states that if the public must respect the artists freedom of creation, the latter must acknowledge the publics freedom of acceptance or rejection. Any other concept is academic and totalitarian.

The publics freedom of acceptance or rejection should be tempered by critical thought reached through the genuine effort to understand before revealing a verdict according to Kepes.<sup>6</sup> He thoroughly agrees with Taylor in the theory conceding the point that you should not pretend to like what you dislike or don't understand.

Newton<sup>7</sup> expresses a unique criterion for not liking the results of modern art. If a negative conclusion is reached, these should be the reasons according to the Newton, "Not believing that it is an expression of genuine experience which brands it as insincere, an unforgivable sin in art as in life", or "Accepting it as genuine, but regarding it as puzzling or undesirable according to whether you are baffled by it or detest it". These seem to be reasonable criteria for negative judgment, but it is important to remember that in a day when criticism is as often confused as the social dilemma we live in. It is possible then that we can not be a true judge of value at present for we are contemporary in thought and apt to be unstable critics.

5. Taylor, F. H., "Modern Art and the Dignity of Man", Atlantic, 182-30, 1948, Dec. 6, pp. 180-186

6. Kepes, G., What is Modern Painting, The Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1946, p. 7

7. Newton, E., "Again that Question: What is Modern Art?", N. Y. Times Magazine, 1948, p. 12-13

This can be proved in part by the known and often accepted element of time as the ultimate factor of judgment.

However, it stands to reason that contemporary activity can not wait for this time element of critical evaluation in the light of necessity of needed value standards in keeping with our cultural patterns.

The necessity here lies partly with factors revolving around the needs of a person in relation to his environment. Assuming temporarily that contemporary art is one of our basic needs of today's environment, it seems likely that to actually see the practical value of this unfamiliar aspect of our living it is necessary to see how it effects us in our everyday lives. According to Barr,<sup>8</sup> it is often felt that the works of contemporary art have little to do with our everyday lives. It is difficult for many to see exactly the functional value of objects dealing in the so called abstract arts. He agrees that this is partly true, that some do not have the distinction of being entirely functional if not at all. It is possibly a human characteristic to think in these terms of use and practical value, but too often another point is neglected dealing with the abstract nature that influences the emotional category of our physical and mental being. It is interesting to note that in Barr's opinion his reasoning answering a question dealing with whether certain values are functional or unfunctional, that in the latter sense mentioned is largely where the value lies of art not understood. The impractical nature of the artist's poetry can

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8. Barr, Alfred H. Jr., op. cit., p. 7

have in many ways the undefined power to lift us out of our humdrum ruts.

Kepes verifies this in stating that the unfunctional side of modern art has a lot to do with ordinary life. In this sense he makes the logical assumption that our contemporary art has the direct effect of an outlet of human emotions; for example, vanity and devotion, joy and sadness, the restraint of the individual. The effect of art is felt keenly in other fields equally as well with varied change of pace as to nature of the item involved. It deals in problems of our civilization, the effects of industrialization, the exploration of the subconscious mind, war, the character of our democracy and fascism, the survival of religion, and, in conclusion, it deals with the esthetic values of beauty of landscapes, animals and people, appearance of our houses, and kitchen floors.<sup>9</sup>

These values presented are of a general nature and will be dealt with more specifically in the context of this paper. They are used for the purpose of preparation in breaking down interfering mind blocks in the way of presentation of the unlimited scope and effect of the active force of contemporary art.

In summation, it is possible through the foregoing introduction to see the necessary direction of action to be taken in producing a satisfactory criteria for the problem of how society can better understand modern art as a functional value in everyday living. It has previously been stated that the final steps toward a better understanding

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9. Kepes, Gyorgy, op. cit., p. 7

is to decipher the reasons for disliking and distrusting modern art. If this is true then it can possibly be assumed that the real problem that is basic to our purpose is an artless problem. According to Wolff,<sup>10</sup> it is one of seeing anew the world we live in. He implies that the method to be used could easily be one of re-evaluation of true standards of a contemporary period instead of the prejudiced direction of the masses toward standard values of an era outlived and steeped in traditional values. Future generations might look back upon it as a period not mirroring our times, but one mirroring the copied values of civilizations preceding ours.

In view and proof of this, it is well verified by these architectural critics of our time, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, that it is an embarrassing situation that entangles this period. It is a situation that does not accredit this age as one of a creative and progressive nature in the field of architecture. This is narrowing the focal point to a sectional aspect of the total realm of the contemporary arts. However, it is representative of the decadence and tradition bound strata of the modern arts. This embarrassment lies in the fact that very few of the representative forms of architecture belong to the contemporary period. It is not necessary to look far for examples of this. A majority of the United States state capitols are of Greek and Roman origin. Our college and university buildings mirror the architecture of all periods from the Greek to the Gothic. About the only thing we can rightly call our own today, according to

10. Wolff, Robert J., op. cit., p. 362

Wright,<sup>11</sup> is the skyscraper and a minority of our small dwellings.

The following context of this discussion will be based upon the preceding examples and the direction of movement will be the re-evaluation of the outlook of today, using a cross sectional picture of the unfamiliar art of the modern period.

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11. Wright, Frank Lloyd, What is Modern Architecture, Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1946, p. 4

## Chapter II

## TECHNICAL ASPECT AND LIMITATIONS

When the term modern art is used it is often misleading and frequently sets up barriers that are not easily worn down because of the misconceptions arising from prejudices derived from the word itself.

For a worthwhile example of this a reference to a situation can be used, concerning one of our leading art galleries in this country, the Institute of Modern Art in Boston, as was reported in Newsweek Magazine.<sup>1</sup> The Institute felt the name "Modern" attached to their show place of contemporary art was misleading to the public and emerged as a general cult of bewilderment to them. For this reason and others to follow, the Boston Institute of Modern Art changed their name to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. They felt that once the gap between artist and public was widened sufficiently, it became an attractive playground for double talk, opportunism, and chicanery at public expense. Newsweek reported that the attitude of the Boston Institute arose out of necessity to present a more accurate picture of the functional value of thier services. They expressed their purpose as a place of opportunity for the creative artist who is ahead of his time, and who must receive an interpretation which is conscientious and

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1. Newsweek Magazine, "Modern into Contemporary", 31:73, 1948, March 1, p. 31

forthright. They expressed another point equally as important taking into consideration the public attitude. They felt that they must proclaim standards of excellence which the public could comprehend.

This is one of a good many examples expressing the need for a more adequate title if for nothing more than breaking down improper conceptions of the art of our day. This example was extended to a greater degree on the surface than seemed necessary for the reason of a brief comparison of the new title, Contemporary, and its relation to the actual objectives and purposes of the Institute.

From this has possibly been conceived one of the reasons for showing publicly contemporary works of art; but another problem arises that is basic to an intelligent surveyance of the subject under discussion, how to achieve a better understanding of modern art through its functional capacity. This problem is, "What is modern art?". The author takes the liberty here of assuming that a definition of any abstract or questionable term is a necessity before an understanding can be reached.

In order to present a clear definition of modern art, the essential question, "What is art?", must be answered for the two are inseparable in their relationship as to their categorical similarity.<sup>2</sup>

Newton<sup>3</sup> answers this question by stating, "Art is the expression of human experience in terms of a medium, the nature of the experience and how it is handled."

This form of art was called visual experience between the six

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2. Newton, E., op. cit., p. 13

3. Ibid., p. 13



hundred years between the birth of Giotto and the death of Cezanne. The artist has always tried to solve a problem that is literally capable of millions of solutions. Botticelli solved it in terms of shape, Michelangelo in terms of structure, Titian in terms of color, Rembrandt in terms of light, Monet in terms of movement and vibrating light color.<sup>4</sup>

This definition is limited in the sense that it depicts all art as oil on canvas. Newton's definition, "human experience", can be used as a key word to briefly broaden this expressed viewpoint, "Art is the expression of human experience in terms of a medium.". This could easily be assumed to mean art is the medium of everyday life, the human experience of participating in the activities of the artistic mediums which are at every ones disposal. For an artistic medium is any medium that man has access to and that he is capable of handling properly with certain technical skill combined with sincerity of purpose.

What is modern art? It may prove advantageous to approach this first from the standpoint of the popular interpretation of the word and secondarily from the direction of its basic value in a limited sense of the word.

Because of the steady widening of the gap between the artist and the layman caused by the factor of lack of understanding of one another's attitude and purpose, the layman has become bewildered and confused as to the meaning of our current art. However, to a certain degree, the artist has become frustrated through the lack of acceptance and understanding of his work.

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4. Ibid., p. 12

To the average person, the word "Modern" has come to mean something that has little hope of being understood because it means to him an abstract, impractical, non-functional item to be shunned because of these concepts. The widening gap between the two factions has become a breeding place for exploitation by opportunists ready to cash in on what has come to be known as another fad, the same in any field where a fad becomes a bargain counter for parasites to prey upon the gullibility of the masses. There are your quacks in any field and the field of art is no exception to the rule. The abstract nature of our contemporary art, if anything, lends itself very readily to the exploitation of all classes, possibly because of the lack of valid information presented by critics who are self-styled and incompetent in their profession.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons the popular concept of modern art has deviated far from what is considered by many the valid concept of the term.

To return to the compact definition of art as an expression of human experience in terms of a medium, it becomes apparent that to give a proper definition of modern art we would simply add a few words and it would read something like this: "Modern art is the expression of a modern human experience in the terms of a medium."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this needs further explanation. The following are definitions of opinions expressed by active participants in the controversy over modern art and should clarify any question concerning the preceding statement.

Taylor<sup>7</sup> contends that modern art simply means the art of our time.

5. Biddle, George, "Modern Art and Muddled Thinking", Atlantic, 180:58, Dec., 1947, p. 61

6. Newton, E., op. cit., p. 12

7. Taylor, F. H., op. cit., p. 30

He is also of the opinion that this art of our time has come to signify for millions something unintelligible, even meaningless. Modern art, he states, describes a style which has become outdated and academic. In further contention of this he believes the masses have been humiliated and patronized by the intellectually elite, those who have built up modern art. It has aroused a people's antagonism and their indignation, for the masses are accustomed to ruling supreme and resent the new art which they felt is the art of the aristocracy of the finer senses, according to Taylor's point of view. Art is generally thought of by the public as a means of communication, frustrates the person who feels they are uncommunicable.

In another approach, that one which takes into consideration the artists definition of his work, Faulkner<sup>8</sup> presents this for his answer to the question of what modern art is. He says that modern art is a method used to communicate the stigma of the esthetic value of creative experience produced within an individual who feels he has this to give to his surrounding culture. In other words, for a clearer explanation, he produces and develops the idea that artists have basic goals in mind, which deal with the felt necessity of communication to creative experiences of others. He acts as a visual interpreter of our changing culture.

Note here the word "changing" for this could possibly give light to the true purpose of current art. The artist could in this interpretation be a factor of mans urge to better interpret his cultural and

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8. Faulkner, Ray Nelson, Art Today, New York: H. Holt, 1949, p. 73

social surroundings. In doing this he reaches into many areas considered "taboo" by the masses, the realm of the emotions, dreams, the unconscious, to search for new meanings of the unknown part of our being. Thus he could easily be compared to men equally interested in the unfamiliar and unknown aspects of other areas of exploration. Man, as it is generally accepted, is in constant search of new knowledge concerning his emotional, environmental, and physical surroundings. The modern movement in art is part of this search for new truths and performs through the capacity of sensual and visual experience.<sup>9</sup>

The often expressed interpretation of any art usually appeals to natural appearances in art, for the work best understood is that which directs itself to the realistic and familiar mirroring of the subject. There is evidence produced by Wolff<sup>10</sup> that the familiar world is not the real world. True it is the world we see through the reflection of an image on the retina of the eye. But what in our physical makeup reflects the image of an interpreted world? What can possibly be more sensitive than a mirror or camera? It is the ability of certain individuals whose senses are highly developed, to see beyond the mirrored reflection of a surface object. Mark Tobey, the noted modern artist of the Northwest uses the term "inner eye" to explain this phenomenon. They are the people who are our scientists, innovators, psychologists, inventors, and others dedicated to research of the unknown. The artist through these qualities, more or less expresses himself through plastic

9. Moholy-Nagy, L., Vision in Motion, Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1946, p. 114

10. Wolff, Robert J., op. cit., p. 363

mediums and is the innovator of unknown esthetic values. The result of his effort is what has become known as our current unfamiliar art, or in the sense of popular expression, modern art.<sup>11</sup> This takes the starch out of natural appearances in art, for we are not sure what natural appearances are.

Before progressing further it is necessary to consider a point of view by Renouf<sup>12</sup> concerning the definition of modern art in relation to the modern mind. He approaches this by differentiating distinguishing qualities of the modern mind compared to the primitive mind. These qualities of the modern mind, Renouf claims, are its dynamism, progressiveness and audacity in comparison to the repetitive, timid, and conservative mind of the primitive. "Where the primitive fears novelty the modern dreads staleness". He maintains that the modern mind is impatient with the merely familiar and forever casts around for new insights. In other words, modern art is not interested in the quest for security through the redoing of things already explored.

This then seems to lead us to even another approach to the meaning of modern art in the more explicit definition of the word. It seems to convey the idea that in a progressive society the qualities of the modern mind must be taken into consideration to achieve a maximum of coordination between our lives and the changing culture we live in. These qualities, it is superfluous to say, are incorporated into the

11. Poore, Henry Rankin, Modern Art: Why, What and How, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931, p. 121

12. Renouf, Edward, "On Certain Functions of Modern Painting", Magazine of Modern Art, July-August, 1942, p. 20

changing capacity of the modern arts, specifically in the light of dreading staleness.<sup>13</sup> Before continuing into the next chapter it is important to briefly present a statement concerning the limitations attached to the meaning of modern art as used in the title, "Understanding Modern Art".

Modern art in its broadest sense encompasses a number of different fields, specifically those of modern poetry, dance, literature, drama and other creative arts. The term "modern art" as used in this paper is limited only to the fine, industrial and commercial arts with the emphasis placed on the first mentioned, and in turn its effect upon the industrial and commercial arts. The succession of events will then consider these materialistic concepts in relation to the functional capacity of related objects to the everyday living in our society.

The importance of the background of modern art is contained in the fact that to understand modern art one must reach into the depths of its brief history to search for the purpose of the transition from the traditional to the new and unfamiliar. The trends will be taken into consideration first and reviewed in the latter part of the context for the purpose of seeing the result and then the means used in reaching this result. This may seem contrary to familiar methods; however, it will be presented in this manner in the hope that it will present a better background for a broader understanding of the objectives, aims, purposes and direction of the movements of new art.

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13. Renouf, Edward, op. cit., p. 19

### Chapter III

#### BACKGROUND OF THE MODERN ART MOVEMENT

The background of modern art is a repetition of movements of all the epochs of history. It is typified by constant change, innovations toward new and better ways of representing our contemporary world, the physical and social environment.

The following questions are constantly being asked along with every unfamiliar factor of change that frequents the current era of art history. One has asked why not go the old road? Why not live in comfort of tradition?

"Why not be content to continue that matter-of-fact representation of external fact which was so easy to understand and under which we had so much pleasure eating our dinners? The answer is that we cannot stand still. It is contrary to the laws of nature. There is no such thing as the lack of change."<sup>1</sup>

Modern art is too often condemned for its trend toward the abstract. If this were the only reason for its rejection, the problem of understanding unintelligibility in current art would be an extremely easy one to explain, for no piece of modern art today is without a certain amount of abstraction. At the time when Whistler painted the now famous portrait of his mother he was condemned by the public for throwing a pot of paint in their faces. They would not accept it because of its abstract nature, for it was new and went against the traditional

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1. Gordon, Jan, Modern French Painters, New York: Dodd and Mead Company, 1929, p. 12

painting of their time. Is it accepted today? It is accepted today as one of the most familiar and traditional pieces of art in our time and still it is a very abstract piece of work if painting can be denounced because of this particular quality.<sup>2</sup>

Is abstract art new? Is El Greco's work of the Seventeenth century new? These two are one and the same question, for El Greco is the most important of modern "discoveries".<sup>3</sup> He is important to the modern movement because of his theory and practice concerning emotions through elongation of form, yet he lived in the Seventeenth Century, long before the modern movement began. El Greco wanted more than anything else to create in his paintings an emotional message that could be felt by those who viewed his work. He tried to achieve this by distorting nature and elongating forms to show pain and other emotional qualities. (Plate I) El Greco is only one of many artists of history to use this method of abstractness, but he was one of the first to place a great deal of emphasis upon it. El Greco's work was an applied knowledge where his predecessors work was not.<sup>4</sup>

The attempt to cover the transitional movements of modern art in a matter of a few pages is a somewhat difficult problem due to the fact that the areas of work are not clearly defined. They overlap one another and in certain cases tend to envelop the whole period. Another difficulty arises in choosing an exact starting point of the modern

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2. Keyes, Gyorgy, op. cit., p. 12

3. Cheney, Sheldon, The Story of Modern Art, New York: The Viking Press, 1924, p. 31

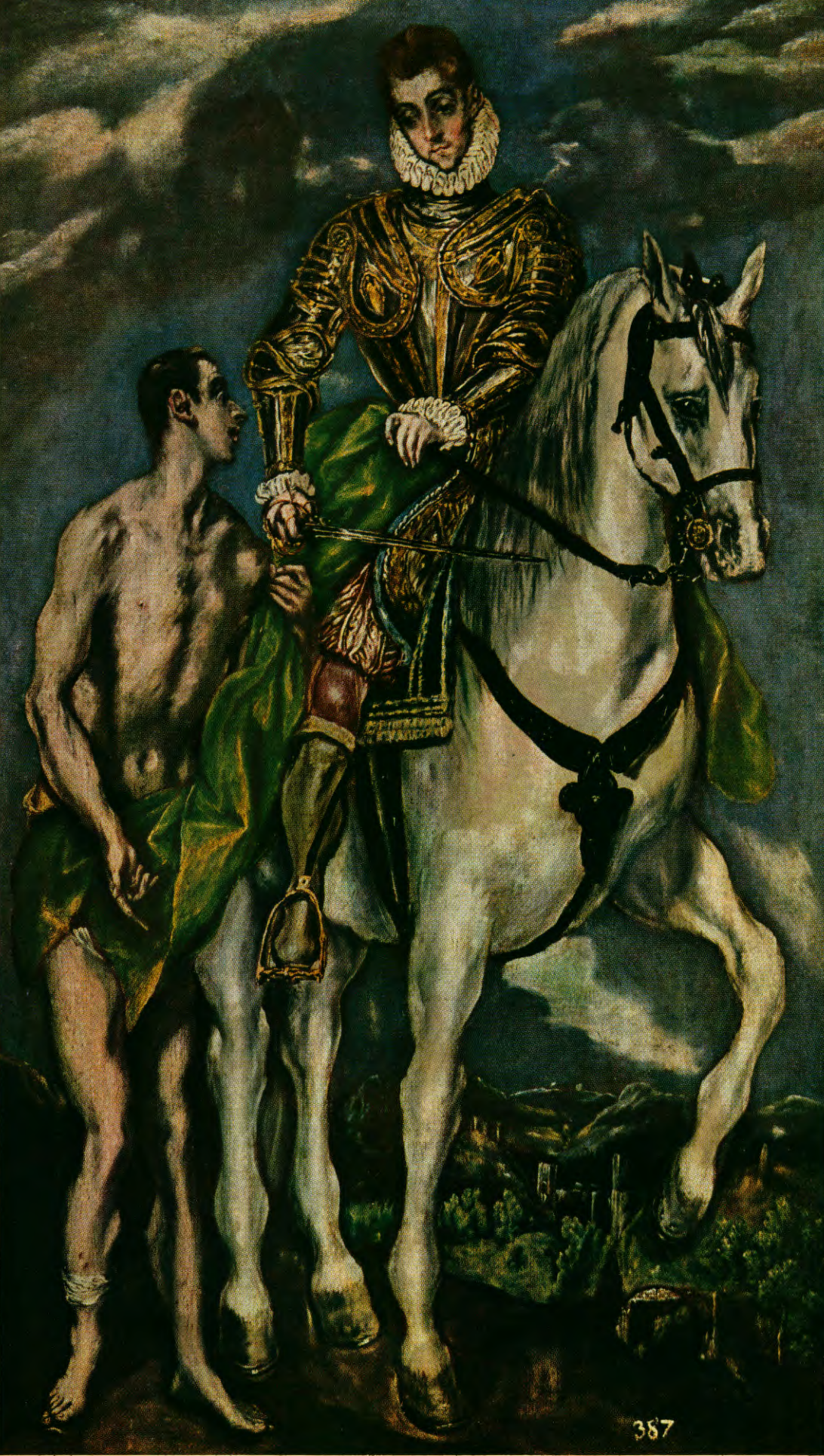
4. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 28



PLATE I

EL GRECO

ST. MARTIN AND THE BEGGAR



movement, for the problem is one concerning the general transition of the influences arising from art of the past. El Greco has been mentioned as the dominating influence of a past period and the study of the movement could very easily start here. However, the limited amount of material written on the modern art period generally considers the Impressionist period as the beginning of the revolution against stale and repetitive forms of art belonging to the past epochs.

The Impressionist period arose out of the urge for change. Artists were growing tired of the techniques used in representing nature in a way that presented only the mirrored reflection of the surface object. The first signs of revolution came in 1860 in France when a group of painters rebelled against classical traditions and struck out along new lines.<sup>5</sup> This action was itself revolutionary and broke with century old customs. The work that the Impressionists displayed at first glance seemed even more opposed to tradition. This innovation was not greeted in a friendly manner by critics and the masses. They accused the artists of painting differently from the accepted masters simply to catch the public's eye. It took years of bitter struggle before the members of the little group were able to convince the public of their sincerity, not to mention their talent.<sup>6</sup>

This group was condemned at first, according to Rewald,<sup>7</sup> because they declined to blindly follow the methods of the acclaimed master and

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5. Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia and Fact Index, Vol. 11, F. B. Compton and Company, 1950, p. 32

6. Rewald, John, The History of Impressionism, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936, p. 5

7. Ibid., p. 6

pseudo-masters of the day. Instead, they derived new concepts from the lessons of the past and present; developing an art entirely of their own.

Gordon<sup>8</sup> explains the belief of the Impressionists, in that they theorized that a line can be, at once straight by knowledge and curved by vision; a color can be green by knowledge and blue by vision. Their abrupt change was characterized by dispersing with the tangible, to study the intangible. Another way of saying this, is that this embryo group believed the important thing is not what is there by knowledge, but what is there upon first seeing the object. Their important objectives were these; they wanted to increase the effects of luminosity, to give a feeling of reflected and shimmering sunlight; they wanted to paint the immediate impression an artist receives from objects of nature; and they aimed especially to render truthfully the effects of light by using only the pure color.

How did they approach these problems? To begin with, they avoided sharp outlines and excluded all unnecessary detail. To do this, instead of mixing paints completely, they placed small dabs of color side by side. From a distance these sometimes gave the appearances of shimmering sunlight. As a result, their pictures seem at close hand mere rough patches of color. They must be viewed at a distance to give the desired effect.<sup>9</sup> Their whole purpose was to gain atmospheric effects by technique of divided color.<sup>10</sup> Another technique used by the early

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8. Gordon, Jan, op. cit., p. 6

9. Compton's Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 32

10. The World Book Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 6048

Impressionists in theory and practice was that of using color with its complement, blue with orange, red with green, for the purpose of increasing contrasts. In this same line, they also found that colors could be diminished by using similar colors against one another.<sup>11</sup> This is easily shown today by mixing together equal amounts of a color and its complement; the result is gray. Through this theory they found that juxtaposed dots of various colors, if sufficiently small, blend optically into a single color of the same tint as if the colors would have been mixed. Through this they found a new process of technique. It was discovered the best way to study the effects of light was by means of fleeting rapid glances, which summed up an impression of the object rather than a detailed analysis. It was impossible to study details by fleeting glances so details of form had to be rejected.<sup>12</sup>

The reason for the beginning of Impressionism, the purpose behind the movement, and the method used in practicing this theory have been presented. The next important phase lies near the conclusion of what exactly did the Impressionists achieve, if anything. The following authors have presented their viewpoints as to the attainment of the goals sought for by the Impressionist group.

The World Book Encyclopedia<sup>13</sup> places the comment that Impressionism brought a new wealth of bright color.

Gordon<sup>14</sup> states that the Impressionists opened the way to the

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11. Gordon, Jan, op. cit., p. 6

12. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., pp. 75-82 *passim*

13. The World Book Encyclopedia, op. cit., p. 6048

14. Gordon, Jan, op. cit., p. 20

study of not what man sees in nature, but how nature affects him. In other words, they opened the door to reactions between themselves and nature. They produced the effect of a momentary look at nature. He further explains that at first glance their pictures are satisfactory, but the pleasure does not last. Because they are swimming in light everything else is lost, objects in their pictures have no reality, they are tinted air, space is sacrificed and design often neglected. Gordon contends the Impressionists reduced everything down to the first vision, to pleasure of color and to the pure appearance of nature which is extremely unstable.

In Read's<sup>15</sup> opinion, Impressionism destroyed its own aim of the scientific method in art, which is still to reproduce the appearance of the actual world. Impressionism ended with Seurat and Signac because science was applied too severely to art. The scientific method became doubtful in principle. To summarize this, Read contends that the Impressionists created a new artistic technique, not a movement.

Barr<sup>16</sup> expresses another point of view, saying that the Impressionists won a very important victory by freeing themselves and the public from the idea that a picture had to be a literal imitation of natural detail and color. This freedom, Barr states, though achieved modestly at first and in the tradition of realism, developed rapidly until eventually it led to a wide range of modern discovery and achievement.

Perhaps the deepest reason, Pach<sup>17</sup> contends, is that after all

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15. Read, Herbert, Art Now, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937, p. 64

16. Barr, Alfred H., op. cit., p. 21

17. Pach, Walter, The Masters of Modern Art, New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1924, p. 35

Impressionism did not so much give the world a new method of representing nature. He continues, "they enriched us through their personal intensity rather than through a new idea: their fruitful color analysis being a thing for the profession rather than the public".

Plate II presents a good example of Impressionistic art in that it shows the momentary and general impression created by the shimmer of light as it falls upon the scene. The forms are all diffused in a soft mottled pattern of flickering light painted in little dabs of color without details, sharp edges, or dark shadows. Barr<sup>18</sup> claims that this naturally made people feel angry, for they felt the artist was cheating them of the minute details which they were used to.

Cezanne saw through Impressionism, guessed its shallowness and began studying masters of all times to bring some of the solidness back to art. He is credited with saying that he wanted to make something solid and durable like museum art out of Impressionism.<sup>19</sup> This new viewpoint became the theory and practice of what we today call the Post-Impressionists. Read<sup>20</sup> considers Post-Impressionism an unfortunate word because it leaves the innocent to suppose that Post-Impressionism was a development of Impressionism. The individual distinction of this group was a sensibility to form expressed in color.

The aims of Post-Impressionism differs greatly from those of the Impressionistic period. The objectives, as explained by Gordon,<sup>21</sup> is

18. Barr, Alfred H., op. cit., p. 20

19. Gordon, Jan, op. cit., p. 85

20. Read, Herbert, op. cit., p. 104

21. Gordon, Jan, op. cit., p. 12

PLATE II

MONET

RE' GATES D'ARGENTEUIL





not to represent external nature as the average man sees it, but an attempt to represent effects which nature produces in the inner consciousness. To verify this, he explains further, the analysis of the means of seeing cannot be pursued without coming into contact with the process of representation, so Post-Impressionism becomes not only conscious of how it understands nature, but also of how works of art are made.

Poore<sup>22</sup> presents several other purposes of the Post-Impressionists. He says that by contrast Post-Impressionism knocks at the outer doors of nature and bids you enter in and explore the "soul" inclosed by this integument. Cezanne represented this by evoking realities from nature and emphasizing the quality of space.

To return momentarily to the theories of Cezanne, Gardner contends<sup>23</sup> that Cezanne saw in objective nature a chaos of disorganized movement and set himself to the task of putting it in order. Cezanne believed that everything in nature adheres to the cone, the cylinder, and the cube. Plate III shows an example of this theory used in practice. It is a familiar example of the place of objects in deep space in relation to other forms expressed, according to Cezanne's own visualization and method of using color.

Before continuing further, several points of importance should be taken into consideration for a more clear definition of the Post-Impressionist period. This period is divided into two groups; the

22. Poore, Henry Rankin, Modern Art: Why, What and How?, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931, p. 63

23. Gardner, Helen, Art Through the Ages, New York: Halcyon House, 1936, P. 724

PLATE III

CEZANNE

LA MONTAGNE SAINTE-VICTOIRE



early Post-Impressionists and Les Fauves, or the "Wild Beasts" of art. Gordon<sup>24</sup> explains that the first group is like a scientist who is analyzing a mineral in which he suspects the presence of an illusive and rare chemical. He extracts and refines, extracts and refines once more until only the pure substance remains. The second group, Les Fauves, is like an experimenter trying to invent a substance, the properties of which he has in mind, but of the exact manufacture of which he is uncertain. The "Blue Window" by Matisse (Plate IV) is an excellent example of the Fauves' work. It shows the extraction of detail to a point where only the contour of the object is left and to where this lack has resulted in objective form becoming near to an abstract design.

This is related to the point which Gombrieck<sup>25</sup> defends, that Cezanne though the most important single individual of this period in its entirety, was not the only artist at the end of the Nineteenth Century who longed for simplicity of design and order in art. A whole group of young painters of this period gave up Impressionism, and tried to simplify the forms of nature so as to make their pictures into clear and bold patterns.

Post-Impressionism breaks sharply with the Impressionists obsession that the surface of nature is worthy objective for the artist and that it merely becomes the painters duty to express light on surfaces.<sup>26</sup>

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24. Gordon, Jan, op. cit., p. 21

25. Gombrieck, E. H., The Story of Art, New York: Phaidon Publishers Inc., 1950, pp. 429-50

26. Gombrieck, E. H., op. cit., p. 436

PLATE IV

MATTISSE

THE BLUE WINDOW



This presents the transition of one period to the other, but the important part to note here is that Post-Impressionism did not rise out of the theories of Impressionism, instead it arose as a revolution against a theory they did not care to accept in its entirety. The next step of importance before entering the Neo-Impressionist period is to briefly summarize the effect of both groups of the Post-Impressionists and see to what extent they reached their goals.

Gardner<sup>27</sup> by-passes the issue as to whether or not the Post-Impressionists reached their immediate goals, but she does extend the point of view that it is relevant that the artists today are working on or developing trends instigated by Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin. Gardner states that the leaders of the Post-Impressionist movement, posed problems, suggested solutions, and started innovations so striking and profound that their influence is still directive.

The Neo-Impressionist period was perhaps brought into recognition by the strong personal direction of two men; Seurat and Signac, the former being the great inspirational leader of the two. Neo-Impressionism is known perhaps more familiarly by the title of "Pointillism" which directly explains its technique.

Poore<sup>28</sup> presents a definition of Neo-Impressionism and makes a few timely comments to its value and direction. He says that this movement is merely a further development of Impressionism. The Pointillists used points or taches of color in place of the broader and more determinative strokes of the Impressionists.

27. Gardner, Helen, op. cit., p. 726

28. Poore, Henry Rankin, op. cit., pp. 62-63



Seurat stated his theory of lines and color and insisted that their direction, whether horizontal, diagonal or vertical, (See Plate V) means something to the construction and psychological value of the picture. Poore<sup>29</sup> agrees to this, but says that Seurat's most important canvases are achieved in minute spots of color. This idea was given to him by Signac who was seeking to get results with tiny dots so juxtaposed as to give the illusion of light when they met on the retina of the observer, in contrast to the shreds and little ribbons of the Impressionists.<sup>30</sup> Seurat's genius lay in the construction of paint, analogous to the works of the architect and engineer.

Seurat's work and the work of the Neo-Impressionists, Poore<sup>31</sup> claims, resembles the hooked rug in texture. The process demanded labor and patience pushed to its last power, and to that degree became tiresome and inartistic; however, the steady prodding eventually justified the means. After all this painstaking work is done the result is one that produces a vivacity, an atmosphere and surface that both convinces and lures. The dogged labor and mental strain involved in the adding of paint "bit by bit" which applied must be true in value, has cleared the field of all whose impulses in art are really emotional.<sup>32</sup>

Craven<sup>33</sup> contends that, as designs Seurat's pictures could hardly be improved upon, but his art is labored to death. He developed the

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29. *Ibid.*, p. 65

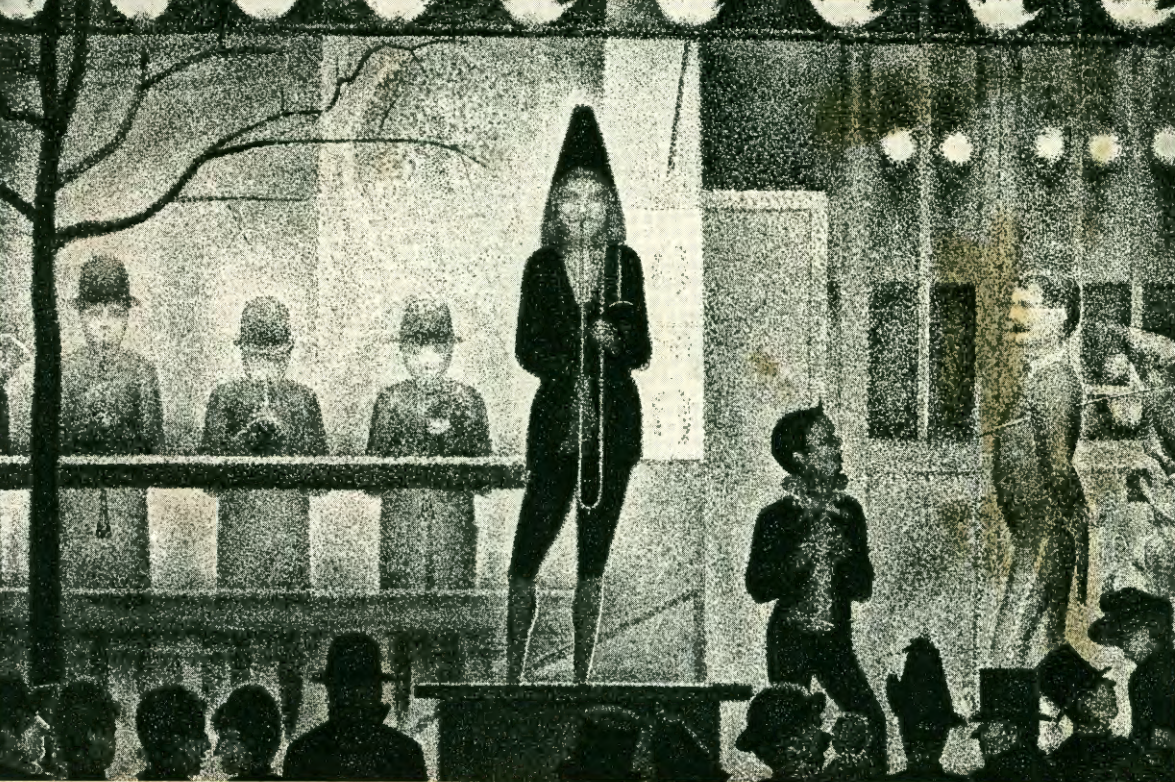
30. Bulliet C. J., The Significant Moderns, New York: Halcyon House, 1936, p. 71

31. Poore, Henry Rankin, op. cit., p. 63

32. Poore, Henry Rankin, op. cit., p. 65

33. Craven, Thomas, Modern Art: The Men, the Movements, the Meaning, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934, p. 75

PLATE V  
SEURAT  
SIDE SHOW



granular method of the Impressionists into the molecular method of the pointillists, binding his powers to the most complicated and nerve-racking technique ever wished upon himself.

The phase of Cubism in modern art is perhaps the era most unintelligible to the layman today. Again this viewpoint has possibly risen from the exploitation of the meaning of the word and carried to a point where it is distrusted by the public as something undesirable. Before this argument becomes any more convincing, it is more practical to reach into the background for a better understanding of the objectives of this "radical art".

Cubism started with Cezanne's painting in which construction of lines and planes was so important.<sup>34</sup> The striking name of Cubism originated with some Braque or Picasso (the two foremost exponents of Cubism) landscapes which did not show too much deviation from nature, except that the windows and doors were left out of the buildings. According to Moholy-Nagy,<sup>35</sup> the resulting shapes were rather cube-like, hence the name.

The cubists, more so than any other group, had designed their objectives very definitely. Barr<sup>36</sup> presents a relatively complete definition of purposes of this group in stating that their theory of Cubism was the process of breaking up, flattening out, angularizing, cutting into sections, making transparent, combining different views

34. Barr, Alfred H., Fantastic Art: Dada and Surrealism, The Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1936, p. 34

35. Moholy-Nagy, op. cit., p. 116

36. Barr, Alfred H., op. cit., pp. 30-31

of the same object, changing shapes, sizes and colors until a fragment of the visual world is completely conquered and reconstructed according to the hearts desire of the artist.

Cheney<sup>37</sup> defines their set objectives as wanting to devaluate reality by disassembling the planes of nature and reassembling them to an aesthetically felt need. In his opinion the fundamental idea of Cubism is the possibility of disassociating the planes of an object seen and to arrange them in a picture, so organized that they will give a truer emotional or structural sense than the original appearance. In other words the Cubists contended that if a person looks at an object from one side it is an imcomplete vision in that you do not see the other sides. The basic theory of the Cubists would then contend that a person with this vision would be looking, in memory, at all the outward aspects of an object at once, thus getting a sort of composite or synthetic view of it. Further contention of this theory would mean that a complete vision would show all the sides of an object at once and also the view from within the object. Classical rendering showed only one view, but in reality objects can be seen from the front, profile, three-quarter profile, and from the back, top and bottom; a person is really defined in the third dimension when he is seen from every angle.<sup>38</sup>

This seems to be generally adequate for the presentation of the Cubists theory, but the larger problem remains; how did they go about

37. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 101

38. Maholy-Nagy, L., op. cit., p. 158

putting into practice their theories, from the standpoint of the actual technical method used. The following critics provide these contentions: Maholy-Nagy<sup>39</sup> explains the Cubists technique in the way they showed the object, its elevation, plane and section on flat canvas, as if it could be seen from many viewpoints, in motion, revolving before the eyes of the spectator. They did not follow the natural conditions of lighting, says Maholy-Nagy, but deliberately used light and shadow effects, a kind of shading, in order to define the objects in geometric clarity. The chief danger in approaching Cubism, Cheney<sup>40</sup> explains, is to think that it means merely giving a physically cubed aspect to objective nature.

In explanation of Plate VI; a lot of the abstract nature of Picasso's Cubistic painting is not taken from nature, but from objects he was very much interested in, such as West African masks, prehistoric Spanish sculpture, for Picasso, although he painted many charmingly pretty pictures, is not concerned with "beauty" so much as with power and intensity. Picasso and other artists found in these primitive sculptures stimulating examples of art which have strength and form of their own, free of copy-nature.<sup>41</sup>

To what degree of success did the innovators and followers of the Cubist style reach? Many opinions have been given, a few will be briefly presented here.

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39. Ibid., p. 113

40. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 111

41. Barr, Alfred, H., op. cit., pp. 31-32

PLATE VI

PICASSO

GIRL BEFORE A MIRROR





Rothschild:<sup>42</sup> "Cubism was a revolution in itself; but it was sort of metaphysical revolution, so that it could not deal with the pulsating surface of things."

Pach:<sup>43</sup> "Had Cubism rendered us no other service, it would be important enough as affording a new insight into the qualities of the picture. What is essential to us is that work the artist renders and perceives is free from mere repetition of findings of other men."

Maholy-Nagy:<sup>44</sup> "Cubism unbound itself from the dictates of naturalistic renderings; from the pressure of conventional, repetitive and imitative demands."

Cheney:<sup>45</sup> "The Cubists in general, instead of letting their principles free their creative powers made the principles their gods, followed them too logically and ended perilously close to aesthetic sterility."

It is Cheney's<sup>46</sup> opinion that the most valuable part of Cubism was the indirect effect it had upon men who never subscribed to coded principles. Cubism he says, is best summed up by Picasso: who invented it, did some remarkably interesting things with it, but passed it on to other tasks enriched.

To continue the transition of modern art in the chronological order arranged by Helen Gardner<sup>47</sup> would mean that Non-Objective art would fall under discussion and surveyance next. Perhaps this is when the movement began its rise, but its peak was reached near to what is known as the Expressionistic period and it seems more logical to place it near this category for better transition of thought.

42. Rothschild, Edward F., The Meaning of Unintelligibility in Modern Art, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934, p. 158

43. Pach, Walter, op. cit., p. 78

44. Maholy-Nagy, L., op. cit., p. 158

45. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 114

46. Ibid., p. 114

47. Gardner, Helen, op. cit., p. 722

Futurism was a direct outgrowth of Cubism and the other movements already mentioned. From the Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists, the Futurists learned how to "destroy the materiality of the objects" by means of brilliant color applied in small brush strokes of the brush. From the Cubists they learned the techniques of disintegration and the principle of "simultaneity", the simultaneous presentation of different aspects of the same object in a single work of art.<sup>48</sup>

Maholy-Nagy<sup>49</sup> explains Futurism as vision in motion. By this is meant that the Futurists applied the Cubist desire of simultaneity, but gave it motion. They announced that a running horse has not four but twenty legs and proceeded to paint twenty legged horses. This explains clearly the primary technical problem of the Futurists was to express movement, force and the passage of time. The whole object was to present on a one-dimensional surface the aspect of an object in motion. (See Plate VII) The process can be compared to the motion picture technique of taking thousands of minute pictures of a man running to give the impression on the screen that he is running.

Cheney<sup>50</sup> evaluates the Futurist movement as a development of painting, but one of having no values profounder than novelty, arresting color or shallow decorative effectiveness. He says, roughly speaking, Futurism blew up because the world came to recognize that it embraced a return to straight representation and the full current of

48. Barr, Alfred H., Fantastic Art: Dada and Surrealism, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936, p. 16

49. Maholy-Nagy, L., op. cit., p. 141

50. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 56

PLATE VII

DUCHAMP

NUDE DESCENDING THE STAIRCASE



progress was in the opposite direction. The Futurists attacked the problem of visual motion, but never solved it further than the motion of Duchamp's Cubistic painting, "Nude Descending the Staircase", agrees Barr.<sup>51</sup>

Expressionism perhaps is the most important movement of modern art for in reality it covers the whole phase of the modern era. Its importance possibly lies in the facts brought out by Cheney,<sup>52</sup> that Expressionism escapes any limitations of technique or method. It is distinguished only by a difference in approach to art. It is broad enough to include the emotionally expressive artists out of all of these other groups; it is apposed only to imitational art.

The Expressionistic period relates to the movement of the Twentieth Century modernists, but in reality the work of Expressionists have gone on through the history of art.<sup>53</sup> Plates VIII, IX and X show a broad span of the Expressionists activity, starting in the Seventeenth Century and carried on today by one of the moderns, John Marin.

The movement of Expressionism (expressive form) seems to be a closer indication of the modernists particular goal. Although it is not a modern endeavor it has never been so consciously formulated as in the past twenty years. Expressionism deals quite generally with the nature of the emotions and whenever something in the nature of emotional content became greater than the qualities of imitation, the artists

51. Barr, Alfred H., Fantastic Art: Dada and Surrealism, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936, p. 123

52. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 192

53. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 60

PLATE VIII

ROUALT

CHRIST MOCKED BY THE SOLDIERS

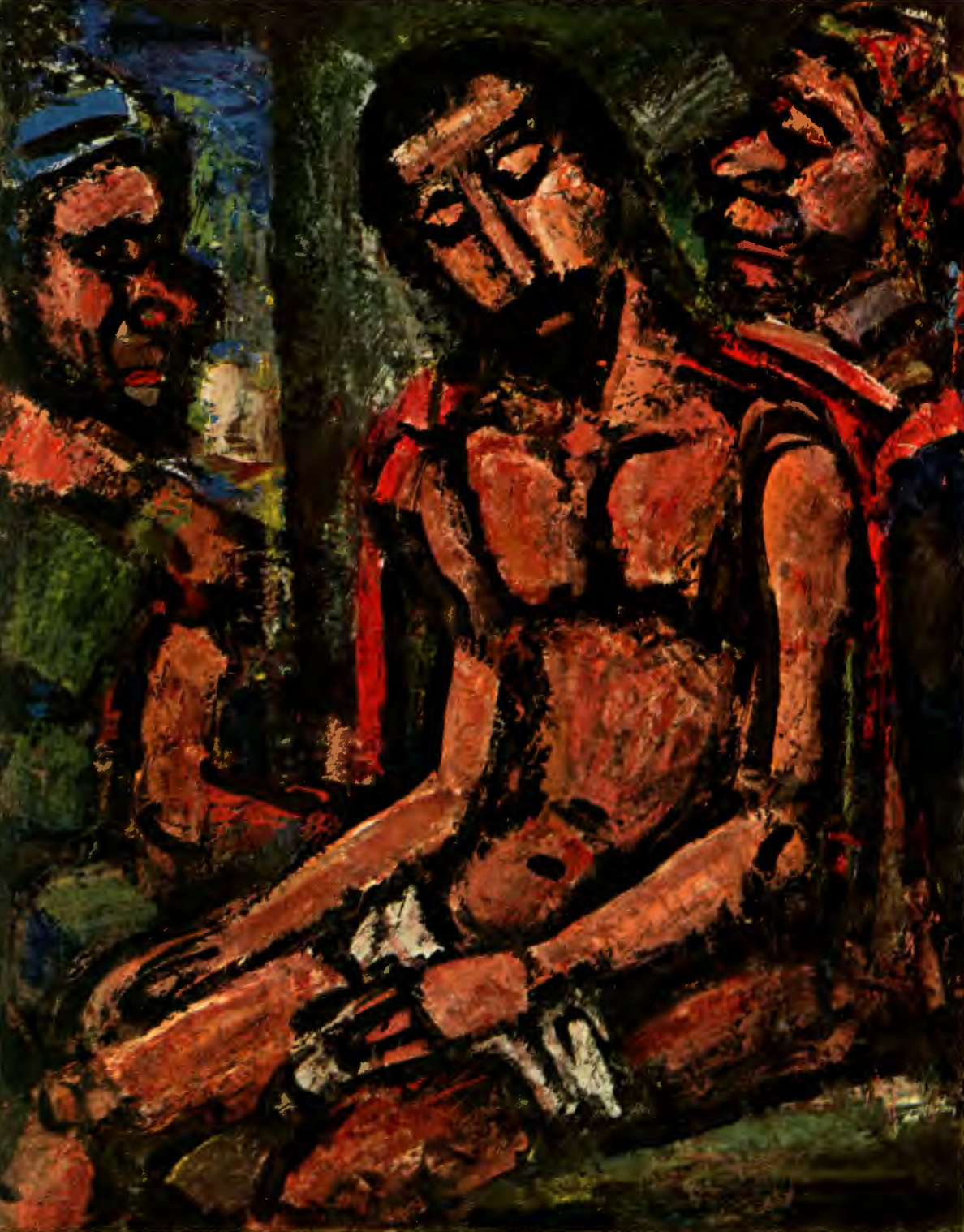


PLATE IX

PICASSO

THE MANDOLIN PLAYER





PLATE X

MARIN

PHIPPSBURG MAIN



M. P. 32

created works that link them with the modern group.<sup>54</sup>

Rothschild<sup>55</sup> presents this opinion in relation to the definition of Expressionism and its effects. He explains that it is a more appropriate style than revolutionary "feeling" for its language is violent and violence is one of the tenets of revolution. By this he contends that it is a fitting vehicle of the passion for action because it is explosive and dynamic; it is the idiom of propaganda, par excellence, because it appeals to the heart rather than to the head. Rothschild further contends that where Impressionism was content with the suggestive, Expressionism demands the eloquent, passionate, emotional, bizarre and intense. Picasso and El Greco used distortion and elongation of form to show emotions related to the feeling of pain, hunger, distress and misery. (See Plate IX)

Barr, as quoted by Cheney,<sup>56</sup> defines the Expressionistic painter as one "who must paint, who cannot paint any other way than he does paint, and who is prepared to hang for his painting". A little radical compared to Cheney's more conservative statement:

"I consider Expressionism to be that movement in art which transfers the emphasis from technical display and imitated surface aspects of nature to creative form; from descriptive and representative truth to intensified emotional expressiveness; from objective to subjective and abstract formal qualities."

Cheney<sup>57</sup> presents criteria for an Expressionist as one who must forget all the non-sense about imitating or representing nature; he

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54. Ibid., p. 67

55. Rothschild, Edward F., op. cit., p. 50

56. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 194

57. Ibid., p. 146

must apprehend a sort of essential reality in whatever he is dealing with, and express in aesthetic form the emotion he has felt. In summary, a conclusion that might be reached as to the purpose behind Expressionism would be to express the inner emotional truth rather than the surface aspects of the object seen by the artist.

"Abstract" is the term most frequently used to describe the more extreme effects of the trend away from "nature". However, according to Barr<sup>58</sup> the image of a square is as much an "object" or "figure" as the image of a face or a landscape. He presents this in argument of abstract art:

"Abstract art today needs no defense. It has become one of the many ways to paint or carve or model. But it is not yet a kind of art which people like without some study and some sacrifice of prejudice. Prejudice can sometimes be met with argument and for this purpose the dialectic of abstract painting and sculpture is superficially enough. It is based upon the assumption that a work of art, a painting for example, is worth looking at primarily because it presents a composition or organization of color, line, light and shade. Resemblance to natural objects, while it does not necessarily destroy these esthetic values, may easily adulterate their purity."

Non-Objective art differs slightly from abstract art in that the abstractionists work in the realm of known objects, but transform these objects by simplification of detail into abstractions for the sake of design. Color and light are the prime motivators of non-objective painting; the basis of this research leads toward pure structural values and is intended as a new measuring rod for esthetics.<sup>59</sup> Kandinsky passed

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58. Barr, Alfred H., Fantastic Art: Dada and Surrealism, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936, pp. 11-13

59. Maholy-Nagy, L., op. cit., p. 150

beyond subject matter (Plate XI) except when it appeared without the conscious intention of the artist.

Dadaism was only considered a joke or perhaps as Read<sup>60</sup> explains it, it was the gesture of men too bored with the tragedy of life to be anything but irreverent. The attitude of the time was; where was the rhyme or reason to things. To the Dadaists it lay in disorder so they dedicated their work to nonsense and unintelligibility. They felt that their goal was to reach universal meaning and the only way they could reach this was to create something that was meaningless to everyone. The Dadaists sincerely proclaimed, true Dadaists were against Dadaism; they meant that Dadaism was against all "isms", an "ism" to end all "isms". They purposely composed something that was completely unintelligible.<sup>61</sup> (See Plate XIII)

Neuhaus<sup>62</sup> explains how the Dadaists approached the problem of complete unintelligibility in technique. He says their picture surfaces were covered with anything that happened to be available in defiance of every artistic tradition. Physical three-dimensional properties of all kinds were attached to pictures; differently textured and colored cardboard, buttons, fragments of hair and rope, pieces of cork and wood; everything was utilized to enliven the picture plane.

Dadaism was simply a revolt against disorder and "isms".

60. Read, Herbert, Surrealism, London: Faber and Faber Limited. 1936, p. 136

61. Rothschild, Edward F., op. cit., p. 71

62. Neuhaus, Eugen, World of Art, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936, pp. 124-26, passim

PLATE XI  
KANDINSKY  
COMPOSITION





PLATE XII  
DE CHIRICO  
LA MUSE



It was born in Zurich in 1916 and died in Paris in 1924. Surrealism arose from its ashes.<sup>63</sup>

Out of the many schools of modern art covered in this chapter, Surrealism is perhaps a more familiar form of current art. As a movement it is not confined to the plastic arts. It includes poetry, drama and even psychology and philosophy. The main purpose behind this movement, according to Read,<sup>64</sup> is the doctrine of its followers who believed that there exists a world more real than the normal world, and this is the world of the unconscious mind. The Surrealists aim is to employ means which will give him access to the repressed contents of the unconscious and then to mingle these elements freely with the more conscious images and even the formal elements of normal types of art. (See Plate XIII) Freud, Read<sup>65</sup> says, was the real instigator of Surrealism because he tries to find the key to the perplexities of life in the material of dreams.

Barr<sup>66</sup> presents the Surrealists objectives as these; they use the mystery and magic of the night to evoke our love of the mysterious and romantic, the strange and astonishing, the dream-like; they appeal to the emotions; their work is often, irrational, impossible, fantastic, paradoxical, disquieting, baffling, alarming, hypnogenetic, nonsensical and mad, to the Surrealist these adjectives are the highest praise.

63. Read, Herbert, Surrealism, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1936, p. 134

64. Ibid., p. 136

65. Ibid., p. 137

66. Barr, Alfred H., What is Modern Painting, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946, pp. 34-35

PLATE XIII

MIRO

THE POTATO



Surrealism made its appearance in 1924 by Andre Breton. The most popular exponents of this art today are Joan Miro and Salvadore Dali. Janis<sup>67</sup> explains that the Surrealists objectives were "revolution of consciousness" not always abstract, but conceived through meticulously exact realism. The Surrealist work of art could easily be thought of as a means of communicating.

Surrealism is generally denounced by other modern artists. The Surrealist realizes that mental life exists on two planes, as explained by Read,<sup>68</sup> he believes a human being drifts through time like an iceberg, only partly floating above the level of consciousness. It is, therefore, the Surrealists aim, painter or poet, to try and realize some of the dimensions and characteristics of his submerged being, and to do this he resorts to the significant imagery of dreams and dreamlike states of mind.

The techniques of the Surrealists are confusing in a way, because of the many used. From almost abstract to the photographically realistic. In conclusion it might be significant to remark that although Surrealism is very old it is a phase which the modern artists have explored with enthusiasm.<sup>69</sup>

The movements presented up to this point have been established long enough to be defined and to find themselves a place in the current history of art. One important phase, however, has been left out. That

67. Janis, Sidney, Abstract and Surrealist Art in America, New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1944, p. 7

68. Read, Herbert, Surrealism, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1936, p. 131

69. Barr, Alfred H., What is Modern Painting, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946, pp. 34-35

phase deals with the social attitude and the effect of the public upon these modern trends. It seems noteworthy to remark that the one thing that all of these groups have in common is the urge of change and the felt need for new innovations in the transition of art.

This process of change, in the past, had its effect upon the social attitude for the most indulgent saw in these new ideas merely a joke, an attempt to pull the leg of the honest folk, as stated by Rewald.<sup>70</sup> He further implies, that almost every phase of every new movement did not come as a sudden outbreak of revolutionary tendencies, it was the culmination of slow and consistent development. Today the work of these so called "radicals" of their day has in many cases become traditional and old fashioned where they were at one time, as was mentioned before, publically called the "Wild Beasts of Art".

Tradition often accounts for the resistance to change. Modern art resisted tradition and involves a disintegration of the cultural values of the past and so does the art of every fertile age, Read<sup>71</sup> contends. It is the inborn nature of the individual to live in the comforts of tradition, for it deals with the known elements of living; one does not have to think actively, he only has to idly reminisce in things of the past. Rewald<sup>72</sup> contends that no higher human courage can be imagined than that of the man who affirms a new aspect of truth, or who questions something hitherto believed to be the truth by public

70. Rewald, John, The History of Impressionism, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946, p. 27

71. Read, Herbert, Art Now, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937, p. 13

72. Rewald, John, op. cit., p. 7

opinion.

There is a definite value of the past for the innovator and it does not lie in the sentimental and traditional material objects of an era lived by another generation. It lies in the value of concepts tried and retried, judged and rejudged, until valid information strained by the sands of time can be used intelligibly by the adventurers of each new age.<sup>73</sup> Values change with each new era, but the danger lies where false and traditional values are accepted in their entirety and used as standards without the infiltration of contemporary change and new goals. The value of tradition can then be used as a factor for temporizing new and changing ideas. This does not imply that it is a permanent anchor; it is a very light and mobile one.

It would be valuable at this point to repeat a segment of the introduction to this chapter as taken from Wilenski.<sup>74</sup> "One has asked why not go the old road?" Why? The answer is that one cannot stand still. It is contrary to the laws of nature. There is no such thing as lack of change.

To return momentarily to the Impressionists for an example, it is found that though their work was at first ridiculed, the art today throughout its whole range shows traces of Impressionist influence. Turning to another example it is found that Expressionism in America today is not extensively popular. Rothschild<sup>75</sup> thinks that it is possibly caused by "mass romanticism" which is somewhat easier to take

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73. Gordon, Jan, op. cit., p. 39

74. Wilenski, Reginald, op. cit., p. 12

75. Rothschild, Edward F., op. cit., p. 47



and has developed in our democracy. "Mass romanticism" is to be found outside and inside our magazines and summer fiction covers, in "Arrow-collar-advertising", our popular songs and movies. The essential difference, he explains, between the two is that one breaks with tradition and one is likely to glorify the time honored.

Cheney<sup>76</sup> repeats the well known saying that innovators are seldom understood in their time; that cultural lag is recognized as a constant factor. The problem is, he explains, one of working toward a method of shortening this cultural and social lag so that we may experience the creative aspects of current times. This will in part be answered in Chapter IV.

The art movement did not expire with Surrealism, it only moved to the category of the unaccepted and unproved trends of more current innovations. One of the more familiar is what has come to be called the art of the Fancy Free and is carried on by Paul Klee. Read<sup>77</sup> explains it as "an open page of the imagination", it is an excursion into pure make-believe. Little more can be said of it for it is a new totally creative aspect of art, feeling for a direction. The over all current trend of modern art is in the direction of pure form through simplification of detail and shape. It is a direct reaction from the work of Cezanne only carried more into abstract shapes and forms. An excellent example of this is seen in Stuart Davis' work. He rearranges nature to suit the design he would like to achieve, much in

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76. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 14

77. Read, Herbert, Surrealism, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1936, p. 126

the same way of Cezanne's technique, only Davis uses flat planes with emphasis on the color of these planes and properly placed creative textures.<sup>78</sup> The result is a very pleasing, uncluttered representation of objective analysis.

There are many other trends, too extensive in number for complete consideration here, but one thing is relatively stable about these creative cycles. They are extremely healthy, for they follow the standards of individual creativeness which coincides with our basic freedoms.

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78. Barr, Alfred H., Fantastic Art: Dada and Surrealism, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936, p. 192

PLATE XIV  
STUART DAVIS  
SUMMER LANDSCAPE



*Abstract scribbles in the sky, possibly representing clouds or a signature.*

*Abstract scribbles in the sky, possibly representing clouds or a signature.*

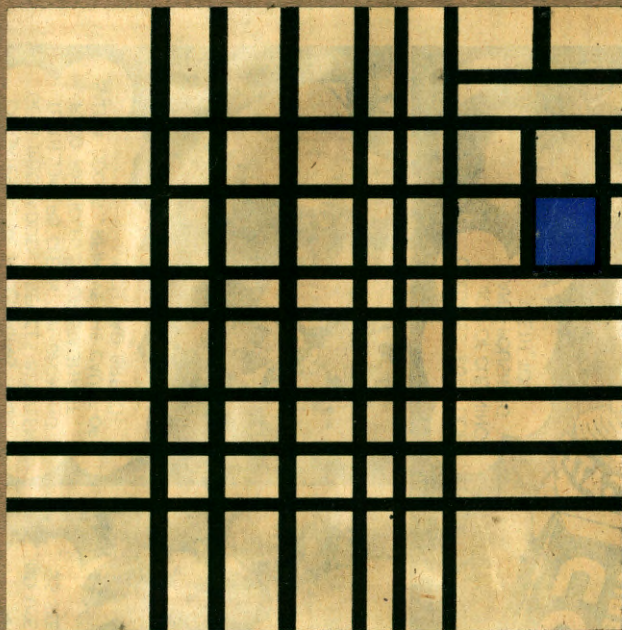
STAR  
YARD

SEINE  
LOFT

PLATE XV

MONDRIAN

COMPOSITION IN WHITE AND BLUE



## Chapter IV

## FUNCTIONAL VALUES OF MODERN ART

In the preceding chapter the emphasis has been placed upon understanding the objectives and purposes behind the various movements of modern art, from the revolution against traditional forms to its present day forms.

The emphasis, with reference to the background, can now be turned in the direction of understanding modern art in the capacity of functional value. Today more than ever the thinking of the individual turns in the direction of material values. This is not meant to imply that he worships material objects as his god; it simply means he is in accord with his environment, both social and cultural. From this it is contended that today man lives in a machine age and is affected by its power and potential significance. Right or wrong it must be recognized that a great many value standards are derived from our material surroundings. In light of this it seems necessary to approach esthetic appreciation, in part, from a material value viewpoint.

At first glance it seems a difficult problem to convert pictorial representation to a material value that will explain the functional validity of modern art. To begin the conception of a work of art in terms of paint directly effecting a material substance must be discarded to a certain degree, for the direct affect is not as great as the indirect effect upon our environment. What is meant by the indirect effect

of modern art propogates the idea that the tendency has been for the Industrial and Commercial arts to parallel and often follow the elements of design set up by the innovators of the Fine arts.

The best way to illustrate the indirect effect of modern art upon the material arts is to approach it through their common element of design. First, however, it must not be forgotten that the theories and practices of the artists of the modern era dealt, in almost every case, with the determination to achieve something they called pure form. They wanted to eliminate all the non-functional parts of their compositions. Cezanne wanted to project the pure form of nature in terms of formal geometric objects, the cone, sphere and the cube; Picasso strove for pure complete vision when he worked in his Cubist period; Stuart Davis today strives to eliminate all the frills of nature with his ultimate goal being to achieve nature's purest form in terms of design and color.<sup>1</sup>

Keeping these goals in mind, the next step is to see how the industrial designer using these principles, projects them into the material objects of contemporary surroundings. The industrial designer has two important objectives in mind; first, he must take into consideration the object's function and secondly, the problem of fitting the design to the function. To illustrate this it is interesting to note the transition of the design in the automobile. The beauty of the modern automobile design was created by engineers and industrial designers. However, when the first automobile came into production,

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1. Barr, Alfred H., op. cit., p. 4



design was not taken into consideration, only the functional aspect of the vehicle.<sup>2</sup> The producers did not realize at that time that they were fitting to an outdated form of the buggy, the new and revolutionary device of the gasoline engine. The design did not fit the function and it took many years before the two were united. Design for less air resistance was needed to balance the new power of the motor.<sup>3</sup> This is an example of where the tendency was to cling to tradition long after its original purpose had disappeared.

According to the deductions previously gathered in the last chapter, abstraction is the trend in modern art. Turning now to abstract design in the industrial and commercial arts, it is found that it has come to be of tremendous importance. Bradley<sup>4</sup> explains that "abstract" means those qualities which appeal to us through intuitive emotions than through social acceptance or traditional meaning. It seems significant to note here that out of a passion for complete functionalism has come the abstract qualities of material objects of our day.<sup>6</sup> This today has come to be understood in the term of "functional design". The Post-Impressionists and Cubists were experimenting with this abstract quality of modern art years before the actual recognition came.

For many years, designers have tried to follow the rules of functional values, but the results have always depended upon the designers

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2. Nicholas, Florance W., Lee, Margaret, Art for Young America, Peoria, Ill: The Manual Arts Press, 1946, p. 23

3. Ibid., p. 24

4. Bradley, Charles B., Design in the Industrial Arts, Peoria, Ill: The Manual Arts Press, 1946, pp. 115-116

6. Bradley, Charles B., op. cit., p. 124

limited knowledge, practice and ability to reason and feel.<sup>7</sup> Maholy-Nagy<sup>8</sup> contends that for ages man has designed utilitarian objects for "function", but it generally turns out they need to be changed, for the end product usually contains elements that are bulky, burdened with an excess of material and wasted labor compared with later developments. In this respect individual progress parallels the movements of modern art, in that there is constant change toward new and better use of our resources.

In the home we find this constant change in both interior and exterior design. The illusion is always present that the ultimate in functional value has been achieved, but look back and see how many times the exterior and interior design of modern homes has experienced radical change. A new idea is soon outdated with each "revolutionary" design appearing in current magazines.<sup>9</sup> In many respects this is a healthy transition, for out of the many innovations, at first considered casual improvements, has been paved the way to a complete transformation of everyones lives.<sup>10</sup> Haggerty<sup>11</sup> agrees that these art problems are never completely solved because of the constant change in life. New needs are continually arising and new ways are needed for meeting them.

It has been said that modern art is entering the home through the kitchen. For example, the kitchen has always been typified as a place

7. Maholy-Nagy, L., op. cit., p. 43

8. Ibid., p. 44

9. Maholy-Nagy, L., op. cit., p. 258

10. Ibid., p. 258

11. Haggerty, Melvin E., Art a Way of Life, Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1935, p. 10

of drudging labor, yet today it is being changed into a place of inviting charm by the rediscovery that things fitted to their uses are perforce attractive and of good design.<sup>12</sup> The kitchen of a home is a good example where everything in it must be fitted to a functional use. The kitchen is also an example of the fact that even though the main purpose of an object is practicability it can be well designed and pleasing to look upon, for they are the things we have to live with and look at each day.

Concerning the remainder of the home, Roasanthal<sup>13</sup> presents the fact that a house may be a nightmare in the lack of good functional planning, but because the traditional interior is often beautiful, the owner helps to perpetrate period design and provides no market for living applied art. Roasanthal remarks, he hopes that this type of individual will eventually combine so many period pieces that the effect will become so unbearable that he will immediately discard the whole thing and start living in the richness of contemporary functional design. Roasanthal adds to this, however, that all modern homes are not good. Many he says are filled by eccentric "modernistic" furnishings that are designed by people whose chief aim is to be different. A good example of this was the radically designed "streamlined" furniture that appeared with the streamlined functional design of the airplane. The fundamental purpose of streamlining an airplane is to decrease the resistance to air flow. It can readily be seen that an innate form of

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12. Ibid., p. 17

13. Roasanthal, Rudolph, and Ratzka, L., The Story of Modern Applied Art, New York: Harpers and Company, 1947, p. vii

the radio or dresser set need not be designed for the purpose of less resistance to air flow, but strangely enough this was the application made because of the trend caused by the new scientific design of the airplane.<sup>14</sup> The results in many cases have become nightmarish interpretations of the contemporary style.

Haggerty<sup>15</sup> explains that the reason for understanding modern art is to enrich the modern normal experiences of home life and to satisfy those experiences through lines, surfaces, spaces, colors and arrangements.

The clothes people wear are even more personal than the homes they live in, for the average person feels his clothes to be part of himself, according to Haggerty's<sup>16</sup> viewpoint. The major art consideration, he contends, is that clothes shall perform to the highest possible degree all the varied purposes for which they are used and that they shall do this with the greatest possible economy of energy on the part of the one who wears them. Haggerty feels that color, weave, pattern, shape, line, length and everything that makes up style in clothes are of the greatest significance to the person who desires to be at his best in the company of others. Through these elements a person intuitively chooses clothes that will strengthen his contact with his fellow man. Clothes are the outward symbol of whatever inner strengths an individual owns and they are good or less good as they increase or lessen these strengths.

14. Schoen, Max, The Enjoyment of the Arts, New York, Harcourt, brace and Company, Inc., 1944, p. 19

15. Haggerty, Melvin E., op. cit., p. 6

16. Ibid., p. 14

The foregoing are examples of the individual's choice of functional material values in his environment. Turning to the effect of modern art on the individual through the means of advertising, there is to be found an even greater means of propaganda for the purpose of presenting products to the public. The word propaganda, first of all, must be understood in its proper connotation. According to the dictionary, propaganda is for the purpose of helping or injuring a person, an institute or a cause. It can be good or bad, and in advertising it pleads similar consequences.

Symbolism as used by the modern artist, from Cezanne to Klee, has created for itself the purpose of taking a whole area of understanding and using one segment of visual perception chosen carefully to present total understanding of that phase. Nicholas<sup>17</sup> implies that the chief reason for advertisement is to catch the attention of the reader and persuade him to buy. Comparing the method here to its purpose, Rand<sup>18</sup> explains that the symbol is the most meaningful in a society where its people have little time for reading complicated small print. Therefore, the best method that can be used in modern advertising is that of using a well designed symbolic idea constructed to tell the whole story at a quick glance. Another reason for the use of the symbol in advertising is this; the predominant aspect in any of the visual arts is that they have universal meaning; they tell the story in a universal language where there are no limitations of speech or foreign tongue; the meaning

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17. Nicholas, Florence W., *op. cit.*, p. 24

18. Rand, Paul, *Thoughts on Design*, New York: Wittenborn and Company, 1937, p. 4

is clear to the illiterate as well as the intelligentsia. If modern art is unintelligible today, it simply means that we are blind to the symbols of our current trends, for eventually art mirrors every culture, past and present.<sup>19</sup>

Turning briefly to the problems brought forward by the trend toward symbolism, it may be reviewed from the background of modern art that artists from Gauguin to Stuart Davis have used this same method of symbols to express a group of ideas through an image. The new trend in advertising is not actually new, but has carried over from the first innovations of symbolism.

Rand<sup>20</sup> says that good commercial advertising is not meant to be sensational as it has been exploited by certain large business firms. He continues by saying that the first considerations should be; function, form, production and process. The commercial artist's job is to re-create or re-state a problem so that it may function as to its intended purpose. In doing this, the emphasis in a layout is one main center of interest for the purpose of attracting attention and making a favorable impression. The symbolic method comes into play when the artist endeavors to focus the center of interest. One single symbol used properly with two or three well chosen words can do much more selling than a cluttered, badly designed advertisement with many words of explanation. The Container Corporation of America uses this method,

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19. Meier, Norman Charles, Art in Human Affairs, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942, p. 3

20. Rand, Paul, Thoughts on Design, New York: Wittenborn and Company, 1937, p. 4

but goes a step further by using no words at all except their signature. They felt that the use of excellent modern art done by well known artists would explain the quality of their product. (See Plate XVI)

Three-dimensional window display has reached great prominence in the past decade because of the limitless uses of abstract design in selling products. The coloring, use of line, form and textures are especially created to interest and invite attention to the company's product. This is one of the closest examples of the direct influence of the abstractionist experimenters and today's industrial designers. The three-dimensional window display came from Alexander Archipenko who used the mechanics of modern stage setting. Lights and color design were employed by him for achieving a dramatic unification in window display.<sup>21</sup>

This is one example of many where the business man realizes modern art is good business. Alert merchandizing has long sought the aid of art in advertising and display of goods for sale. Examples of art in business are presented Haggerty<sup>22</sup> in the following quotation:

"The dressing of store windows, the display of dress goods and suits, the arrangements of fruit with attention to color, the placing of canned goods upon shelves so as to invite attention that leads to purchase, the design of packages and wrappings, illustration in magazines and the scores of like devices which merchants employ to facilitate trade, all constitute occasions for use of art principles and understanding."

Understanding art is a means of protection, for to be a good consumer you must understand values of materials as functional values

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21. Cheney, Sheldon, op. cit., p. 34

22. Haggerty, Melvin, E., op. cit., p. 18

PLATE XVI

FOSSUM

CONTAINER CORPORATION OF AMERICA





Artist - Syd Fossom, native of South Dakota

SOUTH DAKOTA - annual purchases: \$660 million - mostly packaged.

CONTAINER CORPORATION OF AMERICA



along with good design.<sup>23</sup> In consumer items artificial excesses are violations of modern art and are profitable only because the mass of the people are uninformed and insensitive.<sup>24</sup> It is meant by this that due to radical change and that something is new and glittering the public is often tricked into believing that the new item is much better than the old. It is a matter of good and bad taste, according to Haggerty and can be improved only by increase of common intelligence.

Modern art serves as an important functional element in our social environment. It is integrated into the political, religious and democratic phases of current times as much or more than it has been in the past. Today the emphasis is upon the role current art takes in the political aspect of contemporary living and seemingly deserves a place here as a functional item effecting individual and group living.

Soby<sup>25</sup> declares that one of the most vicious and unwarranted charges against progressive contemporary painting is that it is politically subversive. Meaning Communistic. By this is meant that any art which is not immediately understandable, must have been executed in a sly and dangerous code, aimed at the security of our people and nation. Soby<sup>26</sup> states that these charges are preposterous, for it is disproved by the fact that Russia has decreed that all Communist art must be traditional in technique, clear to every one in meaning and dedicated to the glorification of the state. In the early twenties

23. Nicholas, Florance W., Lee, Margaret, op. cit., p. 81

24. Haggerty, Melvin, E., op. cit., p. 19

25. Soby, J. T., "Art as Propaganda!" Saturday Review of Literature, Vol., 32, May 7, 1949, p. 30

26. Ibid., p. 31

modern art in Russia was suppressed and since then this suppression has been similarly achieved in other Communist dominated countries. Soby's conclusion then is that Communist art in any practical sense of the term, is the exact opposite of what is meant by modern art. The assumption can then be made from the preceding information that art is useless as propaganda unless its message is open and apparent.

Picasso used these words to express himself as to the social and political function of modern art. He said, "Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.". In order to tell the truth, Barr<sup>27</sup> contends, the artist must live and work in freedom. President Roosevelt, with the totalitarian countries in mind, explained this clearly: "The arts cannot thrive except where men are free to be themselves and to be in charge of the discipline of their own energies and ardors. What we call liberty in politics results in freedom in the arts; crush individuality in the arts and you crush art as well."<sup>28</sup>

When Hitler became dictator he immediately passed laws against modern art. He accused it of being degenerate, foreign, Jewish, international. He also forced modern artists out of the country and took their work from galleries to sell at high prices. The reason for this, according to Barr,<sup>29</sup> was that the artist more than any other member of society, stood for individual freedom. Along with liberty in politics, education and religion, Hitler crushed freedom in art.

These two examples of totalitarian abuse of modern art may to

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27. Barr, Alfred, H., op. cit., p. 43

28. Ibid., p. 43

29. Ibid., p. 44

certain persons seem far distant in importance on the effect of democratic living, but there is little in sight to prevent the same poison-out growth spreading disasterous effects unless a realization is reached as to the direction of approach of this wolf in sheep's clothing. Soby<sup>30</sup> presents a very good example of its approach through politico-esthetic censorship. The first evidence showing this trend was through the accusation of a represative reporting before congress concerning the exhibit of modern art collected at government expense for a showing to the armed forces. His point was that the exhibit at the time of public sale showed a loss on the initial investment. In reality it showed a profit of \$25,000. The loss was shown because of the WAA regulations that for the disposal of all surplus materials, a ninety-five per cent discount was given to tax supported schools and museums.

The important thing here, Soby<sup>31</sup> claims, is not the profit or loss, but the congressman's serious assumption that "modern" art is synonymous with Communist art. This has been proved to be entirely false, for the two have been shown to exact opposites. The thing to be watched for today is politico-esthetic censorship coming through statements such as this one presented by the congressman and might easily have been issued from the Kremlin. His statement was: "Leftists in art have succeeded in lowering and are attempting to break down the standards to which artists of the past adhered, to be worthy of the calling of art."

30. Soby, J. T., "Going in the Mulberry Trees"; Fight Against Politico-Esthetic Relationship, Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 32, July 2, 1949, pp. 30-31

31. Ibid., p. 30

The reply to this is aptly presented by Schoen.<sup>32</sup> "Only through complete freedom of creation can the integrity of art be kept alive." For the sake of democratic freedom as an inspiration to mankind, this freedom of the arts as an integral part must be protected from politico-esthetic censorship. Modern art then is functional in-as-far as it is a symbol of freedom of man to choose his own direction. This, however, must be tempered by the sincerity required of an honest visual representation of our contemporary world. There are many techniques used in the interpretation of contemporary problems, but each has the right through a common justification of seeking truth out of chaos.

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32. Schoen, Max, The Enjoyment of the Arts, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1944, p. 167

## Chapter V

## CONCLUSION

"People who try to explain pictures are usually barking up the wrong tree." Picasso<sup>1</sup>

The preceding quotation carries with it a lot of truth, but it does not imply that we must not try to understand the purpose behind modern works of art. To reach an understanding in any field of endeavor, a set of values must be collected for an approach to unfamiliar grounds. In the field of contemporary art it seems necessary to set up limited criteria for evaluation of the modern endeavor. Criteria, along with other critical elements in a changing world, needs a certain amount of flexibility to protect it from becoming stabilized law. Certain criteria will stand the effects of time and the final decision as to its worth lies within time itself. The criteria to be presented here is taken from a sampling of opinions by authors who are familiar with the various aspects of modern art.

First it is necessary to turn to some of the failures concerning the attitude toward modern art, for the correction of these shortcomings are the really valid criteria for evaluating the current art.

Meier<sup>2</sup> calls to attention that the lack of appreciation comes from

1. Barr, Alfred H., What is Modern Painting, Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1946, p. 44
2. Meier, Norman Charles, Art in Human Affairs, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942, p. 3

the inability to obtain proper perspective. Few individuals, he contends, have the opportunity to observe art's multiform nature, its varied function and its full imprint on daily life. Meier argues that the thing that prevents the better understanding of art is the preoccupation with insistent and seemingly unending demands in earning a living and providing primary comforts. This he says has crowded out all avenues of contact with current art. Because of these constant demands, two predominant ideas of modern art have arisen; regarding art as a mysterious and unfamiliar experience and thinking of art as associated vaguely with the "nobler" aspirations. Meier<sup>3</sup> answers this by saying that we may arrive at a better estimate of the purposes of modern art by examining material and findings now available and by keeping an open-minded attitude of inquiry. There must be a greater effort through appreciation to better understand the important role art has played in the life of mankind.

By turning to the mistaken and misquoted viewpoints of modern art, there can be found a valuable criteria for evaluation through new light placed upon these misunderstandings. Poore<sup>4</sup> quotes E. K. Chesterton as saying: "A man is perfectly entitled to laugh at a thing because it is incomprehensible. What he has no right to do is to laugh at it as incomprehensible and then criticize it as though he comprehended it." Added to this, is advice given by H. G. Wells: "It is not much good thinking of a thing unless you think it out."

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3. Ibid., p. 4

4. Poore, Henry Rankin, op. cit., p. 55

Barr<sup>5</sup> explains that one mistaken concept of art is that it is a delusion unless controlled by self-discipline and perfection, which if possible, would be the death of art. The role of the artist enters the picture because it is often erroneously believed by the masses that he is the custodian of that infallible thing called beauty.<sup>6</sup> The artist is blamed if he does not conserve it without change. He is blamed for being the cause, but not forgiven for being the effect.<sup>7</sup>

The artist is condemned for not following the laws of the representational duplicate of nature. An appropriate question here would be, what is the reason for not carrying realism to the point of public demand? One of the best known reasons became apparent when the camera came into existence. For the first time the world was seen in its entire reality. Up to this time it was the main job of the artist to do the work the camera now does. The artist then asked himself why waste time competing with a machine; why hold mirrors to nature, for they cannot penetrate the surface. In the end the camera dealt pictorial realism its blow and freed the artist to experiment and find his own direction.<sup>8</sup>

Photography, however, can become a means of rendering life artificial by the constant repetition of standardized materialistic patterns.

5. Barr, Alfred H., What is Modern Painting, Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1946, p. 43

6. Taylor, F. H., "Modern Art and the Dignity of Man," Atlantic, 182:30, December 6, 1948, p. 63

7. Ibid., p. 65

8. Newton, E., "Again that Question: What is Modern Art?", New York Times Magazine, May 16, 1948, pp. 12-13



The camera has not distorted life, for we see it with a frankness our eyes have never known, yet the camera with its artless detachment and uncompromising truthfulness has rendered this world unfamiliar.<sup>9</sup> By this it is meant that the camera does not distort, but that it can produce extremely realistic abstract photos. This in turn, places in a new light the artist whose visual and spiritual clarity has resulted in works that seem unfamiliar.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, as in photography, the key to the strangeness of modern painting is its nearness to reality.

A valuable criteria in any of the arts, according to Newton,<sup>11</sup> is the performer's sincerity. The following two criteria for evaluation have been declared earlier in this paper, but it is appropriate for repeating at this point. Newton<sup>12</sup> declares there are two reasons for not liking the result of current art. First, is accepting the work as genuine, but regarding it as puzzling or undesirable according to whether a person is baffled by it or detests it; secondly, not believing that it is an expression of genuine experience which brands it as insincere; the unforgivable sin in art as in life.

In relation to this, Jan Gordon<sup>13</sup> has remarked, "we realize that art changes, but it does not progress". To further this contention Newton<sup>14</sup> explains that after forty years of exploring the world of the mind the moderns are still primitives. By this he means that the modern

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9. Wolff, R. J., "Unfamiliar Art in a Familiar World", Magazine of Art, Vol. 39, December, 1946, p. 362

10. Ibid., p. 364

11. Newton, E., op. cit., p. 12-13

12. Newton, E., op. cit., p. 13

13. Gordon, Jan, op. cit., p. 18

14. Newton, E., op. cit., p. 14

artists are the experimenters of a whole new realm of art; they are the forebearers of a peak of culture to be reached many decades from now. The same transition has taken place many times in past civilizations. Modern art today may remind a person of a throwback to the techniques of primitive people. According to Meier<sup>15</sup> that person would be exactly correct in his assumption, for modern innovators, for example Picasso, can paint in terms of classic realism, but prefers the primitive method for its tremendous impact of expressionistic qualities. Roualt uses the heavy black lines characteristic of his religious pictures exactly for this purpose. (See Plate VIII) According to Newton, criteria of modern art should not be in terms of "good" or "bad", it should be evaluated in terms of "skillful" or "unskillful", "sincere" and "insincere".

Barr<sup>16</sup> sets up criteria for the evaluation of modern art for personal consumption. He states that a person's first impression of modern art is that there is a bewildering variety to choose from, but contends that this only reflects the complexity of modern life. Barr explains that it is important not to choose too quickly, for the art which makes a quick appeal or is easy to understand right away may wear like a catchy tune that you hear twice, whistle ten times and then can't stand any more. He continues, that the important thing is not to fool yourself in the way of pretending to like what you dislike, but even more important than this is that a definite attempt should be made to understand what you dislike before revealing a verdict.

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15. Meier, Norman Charles, op. cit., p. 7

16. Barr, Alfred H., op. cit., p. 7

A direct approach to appreciation can only be followed through a good deal of study. In understanding modern art the same resources should be used that would be employed by a person in a language that he has not yet learned to read or speak. Rothschild<sup>17</sup> explains that some pictures are like a primer and then again others have large words and complex ideas; some are like prose, others like poetry and still others like algebra or geometry. The latter would probably refer to the Constructivists who used geometric forms and lines in their compositions. (See Plate XIV)

In summary and conclusion the following concepts concerning a better understanding of modern art can be reached; that modern art is not intended purposely to be unintelligible, that it is the purpose of the artist to express himself as he feels he must to capture a sensitive reaction to his surrounding environment. If modern art is unintelligible, it means that it need not be if the objectives of those who represent the present era by visual interpretations are understood by the greater mass of the public.

It has been found that tempered discretion is a valuable instrument in the hands of the critic, amateur and professional alike, for much that has become unintelligible in contemporary art to the spectator is uncommunicable solely because the artist imitator has failed to comprehend the meaning of forms and techniques he has borrowed from the master.<sup>18</sup> In other words, people are often confronted with second-rate minds.

17. Rothschild, Edward F., op. cit., pp. 6-7

18. Taylor, F. H., op. cit., p. 61

In view of the main problem, evidence has been given that modern art is related directly and indirectly to functional and material values in everyday life; through the home, personal uses, commercial advertising, industrial design and elements of various social aspects.

One of the most important discoveries to come from this research arose out of evidence showing that art history is overburdened with the tragedies of intolerance and prejudice and that these have resulted from outdated visual habits over realities of the present. Above all, the emphasis has not been placed upon selling modern art, but upon the need for intelligent personal choice tempered with a very mobile criteria for a better understanding of contemporary art.

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